Fool's Gold

by whatsthedamage

Summary

Carmilla HSAU, or the one with GSA co-captains LaFontaine and Perry, puppy quarterback Kirsch, track team captain Danny, broody teenager Carmilla and Laura who is about to find out she is not as heterosexual as she thought.

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Prologue

“Class, class - please. Just be quiet for the last five minutes so I can explain your next assignment.”

“But if we don’t shut up, you won’t be able to tell us and then we don’t have to do it.”

The class laughs as Mr. Beckett points his finger at the distraction, "Brody, one more outburst from you and you're going to miss the game this Friday night for serving detention."

The boy sinks lower in his seat, mumbling to himself, "It's Kirsch."

"Anyway, the assignment: you'll first be put into pairs. Instead of having to hear you whine about selections I'll just have you choose them yourself."

The students whisper to each other as he bends down to grab something from underneath his desk, a small grunt echoed throughout the class as he stands up and drops a large bag of flour onto the tabletop.

"I present to you: a baby," he wipes his hands together to get rid of the excess flour, "Not just any baby, but your baby."

There's a scoff from the back of the class from Carmilla, but he ignores it. She's very bright but sometimes like a toddler - it's best to just ignore the outbursts and not give them any attention.

"Once your pair picks up your flour baby, you will be responsible for your new bundle of joy,"-an actual groan from Carmilla this time, a few giggles from Laura and LaFontaine, and a shh from Perry-"for a whole week. You and your partner will need to be attached at the hip for this, so choose wisely."

Danny raises her hand and he waves it off, "Wait until I finish explaining for questions."

"But what about those of us that have extracurriculars? To try and sync our schedules may be too hard."

"Which is why I said choose wisely. Listen, this needs to replicate real life as much as possible.""

"So you want us to blame the sack for all the things that went wrong in our life?"

"Miss Karnstein," the class falls silent, aside from the tap of Carmilla's pen against her desk. He blows out a long breath, "Come to my desk after class."

There's a chorus of ooo's before Carmilla bites out, "Grow up, losers," and goes back to scribbling in her notebook.

He sighs - it's been too long of a day and it's only almost half past two. He rubs at his forehead and gestures to the pile of papers on his desk, "Just come and grab the rubric. Once you have a partner, come write your pairs down on the sign-up sheet and grab your bag of flour."

He sits down and watches the students begin to circulate the classroom, not looking forward to the conversation he's about to have with Carmilla.

(Is it too early for him to book his yearly vacation?)

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Laura watches as Carmilla stands at Mr. Beckett's desk, expression never changing from the perfect mix of quiet apathy and genuine disdain. She resists the urge to eavesdrop and instead scans the room for potential partners.

Perry and LaFontaine are out for obvious reasons. Her eyes fall on Danny and she considers it, but she did make a good point about being too busy and she doesn't want her mark to be compromised.

Her eyes gravitate back to Carmilla, who has now moved from apathetic disdain to hateful brooding. Laura drops her eyes to the paper in front of her at Carmilla's sudden turn back towards her desk.

Laura lifts her head after a few seconds to get a better look and is suddenly met with a very tall, very excited boy in front of her.

"Hey! So, you wanna have a baby together or something?"

"Uh," she can see Carmilla out of the corner of her eye and smiles apologetically at him, making a split-second decision, "I'd love to, Kirsch - in a strictly platonic, only flour-baby kind of way - but I think I'm going to broaden my horizons with this project."

"What?"

"I'm going to try working with someone new."

"Oh!" He nods, "Nice, that's real cool of you. Just thought it would be fun like when we paired up for the science fair, but it's all good."

He turns to leave but then pauses, looking like he's suddenly remembered something, "You coming to the Zeta party this weekend?"

"Uh, sure?"

"Sick. Make sure to bring more hotties," he smiles and looks across the room, tossing out a see ya before walking off.

She taps her pen, staring in Carmilla's direction before taking a deep breath and walking over.

Carmilla is doodling some intricate caricature on the side of her page but makes no move to look up.

"Can I help you?"

She smiles as she notices that it's a not-so-flattering version of Mr. Beckett with devil horns. It's actually quite good.

"Hello?"

She starts, "Uh, yeah, I was just wondering if you wanted to partner up?"

Carmilla tilts her head up, giving Laura a once-over, "Didn't take you to be into lady-loving."

"Huh?"

Carmilla looks up fully now and smirks, nodding her head in Kirsch's direction, "You turned down the chance to make fake babies with jock boy for the more sapphic route. I'm surprised."

She opens her mouth to say something but all she can manage is a choked sputter of, "No, I didn't...wait-"
Carmilla laughs and goes back to her drawing, "Relax, Cutie, it was a joke."

Laura furrows her brows and scrunches her lips, "You could have been more clear."

Carmilla shrugs, looking up at her with faux innocence, "But where's the fun in that?"

She huffs, "Listen, if you didn't want to be my partner you could have just said so."

Carmilla doodles for a few seconds, Laura feeling the skin on her cheeks warm. She sighs and goes to leave but there's a soft grasp around her wrist, "Beckett said if I don't do this project he'll fail me, so, yeah, I'll be your partner or whatever."

Laura smiles and nods, "Okay, yeah. Great. Here," Carmilla releases her hold as Laura takes out her phone and passes it to the other girl, "Give me your number."

"Wow, very demanding. Another surprise."

"Just be quiet and give me your number."

Carmilla stares at her as she types the number, a hint of being impressed flashing across her eyes. Laura raises an eyebrow and smiles wider as Carmilla gives her the phone back, "See? That wasn't so hard, was it?"

Carmilla furrows her brow, "This is probably going the biggest mistake of my life, isn't it?"

Laura laughs as she walks away, "Not a chance," she throws over her shoulder, "I'll see you tonight."

"Wait, I didn't agree to-"

"I'll text you!"

Laura giggles as she listens to Carmilla grumble to herself from behind her.

(Trying something new: what's the worst that can happen?)

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LaFontaine scribbles a few notes onto the paper in front of them, "So, I'm thinking that I can tackle the math portion for finance and some research on the effects having children has on parents."

Perry opens her planner and starts writing some notes in the margin, nodding along, "Yes, and I was thinking of working up a feeding plan for the baby and maybe a list of possible careers for us to choose from?"

"Mhm, that's really good. As long as you include-"

"Marine biologist. I know, I know."

LaFontaine let's out a soft laugh, "Wicked. Do you want to get started on the poster this weekend?"

Perry looks up, "I was thinking we could do a PowerPoint instead. You're so good with technical stuff. And it looks so much more professional."

"Yes, but," LaFontaine leans in close, "posters are so much cooler. We could have a glitter fight again!"
They watch as Perry's eyes go wide and try their best not to crack a smile, "That was one time and my mom still brings up how I ruined her antique rug. That is never happening again. Plus," Perry straightens up, "like I said, you're really good at it. You'll make it look amazing."

LaFontaine let's out a whine, "But Perr, glitter-"

"Sweetie?" She looks over at them again with batted lashes, "it's a no."

LaFontaine slumps, "Fine. But just for that I'm going to add a report on the biological properties of the flour baby."

"Sure, sure," Perry flips a few pages of her calendar until she lands on today's date, "Do you want to come straight to my place after school?"

"Yeah, but what about-"

"Your biology club? It meets every other week and since you met last week you're free tonight."

LaFontaine smiles, a warmth spreading in their chest, "No, I know that. I was going to ask about your school council meeting tonight. It's every Thursday, right?"

A slight blush paints Perry's cheeks, the sight encouraging the warmth inside of LaFontaine, "Yes - but it got cancelled earlier today," she pauses, "Sorry, I didn't think-"

"I'd remember? I know I'm forgetful, but I remember the important things."

Perry looks like she's going to say something but stops, her eyes falling somewhere behind LaFontaine. They turn slightly and follow the sight line, landing on a few students still loitering in the classroom. When they look back Perry is doodling in the corner of her notebook, a clear L+P in bold around a swirly heart. She looks up at LaFontaine and smiles sadly, but LaFontaine is too busy trying to control the hammer in their chest to notice.

They nod, tapping the doodle with the tip of their pen, "Yeah. Me too."

Perry smiles so bright that LaFontaine feels like the world will never see nightfall again. They control the urge to tuck that stubborn piece of stray curl behind Perry's ear and grips their pen instead, "So, yeah. Tonight?"

Perry nods, her smile never faltering, "Tonight."

LaFontaine grabs their stuff and heads towards the door. They know Perry is probably freaking out about this but they aren't worried at all.

(They've been playing house and pretending to be married to each other ever since they were seven. This is a piece of cake.)

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Danny sits at her desk, sighing as she stares at the people left in the classroom. All of the other Summer Society girls have paired up - being a leader can be lonely sometimes - so there’s only a few people left to choose from. She’s about to get up and approach Laura when she sees Kirsch beat her to it.

She sighs, mumbling great under her breath.

(She mentally adds this as reason number 32 as to why she hates him.)
She re-reads the rubric a few times when she notices Kirsch walking away - without Laura. Danny smiles, getting out of her seat to quickly try and catch the girl before someone else gets there first.

There’s two desks to go when Kirsch blocks her path. She rolls her eyes and goes to side-step him but he matches her movements.

“I know this goes against your cellular biology, but can you not be annoying for at least five seconds to let me pass?’”

He scowls and adjusts the strap on his backpack, “Listen, there’s no one left to pair up with so we’re going to have to be partners.”

Danny laughs - full and mocking - in his face, “This has to be a joke.”

He shrugs, “I wish it was.”

She stares at him in disbelief then tilts her head to check out the rest of the room. Mr. Beckett is at his desk grading papers, LaFontaine and Perry are huddled close in their corner and Laura is walking over to Carmilla’s desk.

Everyone else has left, leaving Danny to stare back at the overgrown toddler standing in front of her. She shakes her head, “No - nope, not happening.”

“Come on, Summer Psycho, I don’t want this either, but-”

“Excuse me!” She cranes her neck and raises her hand, waving in Mr. Beckett’s direction, “Is there an option of being a single parent for this assignment?”

The teacher doesn’t look up from his papers, “Just come sign your names and get started Miss Lawrence.”

She growls and turns back to Kirsch, “Maybe we could switch partners or something. Isn't there some Zeta idiot you want to pair with?”

Kirsch scrunches his nose, ”I don't know. Jake is kind of crushing on Sam and I think he's going to use the project to make his move.”

"Wow. How romantic.”

Kirsch straightens up, ”I think it kind of is, actually. He’s liked him for a while so I'm not gonna be the one to ruin that. It totally goes against, like, the bro code.”

"The bro code," Danny deadpans, "I'm stuck with you because of the bro code?"

"It's a pretty honourable code if you actually read it." "There's an actual-" Danny shakes her head, "Okay, no, whatever. We’ll figure this out later." She turns and walks back to her desk, the sound of Kirsch close behind her, "What about now?"

She puts her book and pens into her backpack and slings it over her shoulder, ”Now I've got a Summer Society meeting during my spare and I have to go prep for it.”

"Yeah, but what about our project? You're totally bailing on your commitment.”

She laughs, ”I'm not bailing on anything, I just know where my priorities lie. A girl code, if you
Kirsch scowls at her and she smiles wider, "If you'll step aside, please. I'm running late."

He makes a show of stepping back and does over-exaggerated sweeping gestures with his hands in the direction of the door, "Please, please - I wouldn't want to keep you from your super important meeting."

She pauses to insult him but is only able to spit out a groan. He smiles smugly and she flips him off, "Just text me later, bro."

She storms off and practices deep breathing exercises all the way to her meeting.

It's only a few weeks. Maybe this won't be so bad.

(Shedoesn't have time right now to think of what it will be like if it is.)

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"Um, so this is my room."

Laura drops her bag by the door as Carmilla waltzes in and plops herself down on the bed. Laura sighs, "Please, make yourself at home."

Carmilla takes off her bag before reaching in and grabbing a book, "Don't mind if I do, Cupcake."

Laura hesitates on the spot for a few seconds before crossing the room to sit at her desk. She opens her laptop and swivels her chair around while she waits for it to start, "What are you reading?"

"Aristotle."

"Oh," Laura takes out the rubric, "I thought it might have been something to do with - oh, I don't know - our project."

Carmilla's eyes never leave the page, "Sorry to disappoint."

Laura growls under her breath as she turns to her desk and starts a word document and some browsers for research.

She types at her computer for the next twenty minutes, periodically sighing to herself, the exaggeration of each increasing with every new one.

By the fifth sigh she hears a book slam from behind her, "Do you have something to say or do I have to assume you always breathe in such an annoying manner?"

Laura turns to face her, fake smile spread across her face, "It must be all the stress of having to do this entire project by myself."

Carmilla grins in such a sickly sweet manner that Laura feels like she'll get diabetes just from staring at it, "Now why would I help when you're obviously doing such a great job all on your own?"

Laura grits her teeth and turns back towards her computer. She hits print and heads over to the bed with the sheets of paper once they're ready, "Okay, enough of your crap. Here are some things to read for us to get started."

Carmilla grabs her book again, not even glancing anywhere close to the direction of the papers, "I'll
give them a good read when I'm home later tonight."

Laura takes a deep breath, "Okay. Why don't we start with occupations? If we have a baby to feed, we'll need jobs."

Carmilla shrugs, "I don't care, pick whatever you want."

Laura sighs, "You know, if you weren't going to contribute to this at all I don't understand why you even came over."

Carmilla turns a page, pausing, "Maybe I just didn't feel like going home."

Laura studies her for a moment, "Everything okay?"

The other girl smiles sarcastically, "Just peachy." She drops the smile and rolls her eyes, "Not everything has to be an after school special, sunshine. I was just bored," she glances around the room, "Although I should have had more hindsight that this wouldn't be the best entertainment."

Laura scrunches her face, "What's that supposed to mean?"

Carmilla waves her hand around the room, "Doesn't really look like you have anything fun to do in here. And it's so...yellow."

"Well I didn't bring you over to have fun," she crosses her arms, mumbling, "And I chose the colour when I was ten after a really bad day, so, whatever."

She can see Carmilla’s smirk from behind her book but she ignores it, "Anyway, what about budgets? Numbers aren't really my strong suit so maybe you could plan out our finances."

Carmilla shrugs, "I don’t really care. I’m sure you’ll do fine with it."

Laura closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, “Okay, I think I’ve been going about this all wrong. Let’s start off with something more fun.”

Carmilla quirks her brow, “I’m listening."

“Baby names!”

The other girl rolls her eyes and slides further into the bed, holding the book closer to her face, “Oh. How stupid of me to think you would mean something actually fun.”

Laura smiles and shifts so she’s closer to Carmilla on the bed, “Okay, I’ll go first. I’ve always liked the names Jasmine, Isabella, Cody and Taylor. What about you?”

“I don’t care.”

Laura groans, "Carmilla, come on. Give me something to work with, here," she pauses and grins, "I'll just have to guess for you. How about...Jennifer?"

"Sweetheart, I don't care what you name the stupid flour sack."

"It's not a big deal, why can't you just contribute to this one thing?"

"Because I don't care."

Laura grabs one of the sheets that she printed out with a list of names, "Henry? Lucas? Stephanie?"
Laura watches as Carmilla tightens her grip on the book, "Don't care. Don't care. And...don't care."

"My God, it's just a name - why do you have to be so difficult?"

"Because I. Don't. Care."

Laura groans out in frustration as she scrunches the paper and rips it in the process, "Do you care about anything? This project? Our grade? Or do you only care about yourself?"

Carmilla slams her book and stills, jaw locked and eyes burning, "Oh, you think you've got me pegged perfectly, don't you? Poor, little Carmilla who needs a pity invitation for a group project because she's such a selfish loner that cares about nothing outside of herself."

Laura's cheeks warm and she tries to stop the bubbling rage in her chest, "Don't try and turn this around-"

"No, whatever," Carmilla is up and stuffing her book back into her bag before Laura has a second to blink. She's almost at the door when she turns around, "You know, maybe I have more important things to do then entertain the idea of parenthood or budgets or fucking baby names. Good luck on the project, Princess."

She slams the door behind her as Laura shouts, "Guess we'll just have joint custody, then!"

She flops back on her bed and grabs the nearest pillow to throw over her face so she can scream into it.

(What's the worst that could happen? Maybe caring so much about why someone doesn't seem to care at all.)

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"Babe, can you email me the stuff you’ve researched so far about parenting?"

LaFontaine looks up from the book they’re reading, smirking, “So you can edit it?”

Perry blushes, “It’s not meant to insult you, we just both know that spelling isn’t your strong suit.”

They laugh and shift on the bed to reach down and grab their laptop, “I’m just kidding with you.”

Perry rolls her eyes and types for a few seconds before looking up at them, “Oh, hey - mom wants to know if you’re still coming over for brunch on Sunday?”

“Perry, I’ve been coming over every Sunday for the past two years. Do you really have to ask me every time?”

“No, not every Sunday. There were the two weekends you missed earlier in the year because-”

“Because I had the flu. Your mom needs to relax.”

Perry smiles, “You know she’s worse than me. She’s already texted me three times from work to find out if we’ve actually been doing work on this project.”

LaFontaine bites their lip to stop from laughing, “Did you inform her that I cut out of band practice early last night to work on it with you?”
Her eyes widen, “No.”

A laugh manages to escape LaFontaine’s mouth, “Fine. But did you at least mention that even though we got the assignment two days ago that we’re already almost done the written report?”

Perry huffs but still manages to smile, “Yes - but she still worries.”

They shake their head and send off the email, closing their laptop and setting it back on the floor before opening the book in front of them to the last page they were reading, “Sent. So, since it’s the near the end of the month does that mean your mom is making my favourite cupcakes?”

Perry nods, “Mhm.”

“Great. Then tell her I wouldn’t miss it even if Bill Nye himself was giving a TED talk on the same day.”

Perry rolls her eyes, “Oh, and here I thought that you were coming to spend time with me. But now I learn it’s the cupcakes and not me that is worth missing Bill Nye for.”

They scoff, “Please, I’d give up science itself for you if I had to.”

They continue to read for a few seconds before realizing the strange quiet that fell over the room. They look up and Perry is just staring at them, the oddest expression on her face.

“Babe…?”

They don’t have time to think before Perry is crawling over and setting both hands on the side of their face, kissing them with so much delicacy and tenderness that LaFontaine feels their heart stop. They melt into the kiss, grinning as Perry reaches around and scratches at the back of their scalp. They discard the book off the side of the bed, giggling into the kiss as they hear the loud thud of it against the floor. They reach up and run their hand through Perry’s hair, humming into Perry’s mouth as she continues to massage the back of their scalp.

She is literally the best kisser. The best kisser in the entire universe.

Perry pulls back and grins, "You really think so?"

Oh. So they said that out loud, "Um-"

They're cut off by soft lips, the feel of Perry's mouth stretching into a smile against their own.

Perry pulls away and LaFontaine is left grinning like an idiot, "If that's your reaction, should I compliment you more often?"

Perry slaps them lightly, "You would compliment me anyway, regardless of the kisses," she looks down, "But you know I love kissing you, too. I know I don't do the other stuff, and I'm sorry-"

They scoff, "Perr, please. I'm not going to do anything you're not cool with. Besides, if my girlfriend is the best kisser in the universe I'm pretty sure I'm the real winner here, so."

Perry laughs, “You're ridiculous,” she leans forward for a brief peck, “Sweet, but ridiculous.”

She moves back and grabs a thick book from her nightstand, "Okay, let's talk baby names."

LaFontaine balks, "Did you... buy a baby book?"
Perry looks at them like they've grown three heads, "How else were we going to decide?"

"Oh, I don't know," they crawl forward until they're leaning against the headboard beside Perry, "Pick one out of a hat?"

Perry pulls a face, "Never."

LaFontaine sighs and opens their arm for Perry. She shifts so she's resting her head against their chest and opens the baby book to a random page, "Okay. How about Francis?"

"Ew, that's an ugly name."

Perry sighs, "Fine," she flips a through some pages, "Um, Salvatore?"

"Nope. The Vampire Diaries ruined that name for me," they run a hand through Perry's hair, "You know-"

"No."

"What?"

"We are not naming our child Darwin. I'm sorry, baby, but no."

"I wasn't going to say that! I was going to say-"

"They aren't going to be called Mendel, either."

LaFontaine pouts, "But babe-"

Perry reaches up to tangle her fingers with the hand LaFontaine has in her hair, bringing their joined hands to her lips to kiss their knuckles, "Nope. Besides, we should choose something that we both like."

They sigh, "Okay, okay, fine. But I'm keeping those on the table for middle names."

"Fine," she drags her finger across the names of the page when she suddenly stops, "Oh!" She starts to flip a bunch of pages at once, "I know where we should look."

She flips for a few seconds before landing on the unisex chapter of the book, "Here we go."

LaFontaine smiles into Perry's hair, "It's a bag of flour. It doesn't even have a gender."

"Exactly! Even more reason. I don't want to - to put our child into some sort of box before they even know how to walk or talk. It's unfair."

LaFontaine's breath catches in their throat, that tight feeling in their chest squeezing extra hard.

(The one that tightens even more so whenever Perry says something inexplicitly and utterly Perry.)

"Perr..."

Perry shifts and looks up at them, "What's wrong?"

They shake their head, the tightening in their chest sending tingles to the tips of their fingers. They try to adequately express how full they feel - full of awe and appreciation and love - but all they can come up with is bringing up the hand that isn't bound to Perry and reaching up to trace $L + P$ on her
Perry watches them trace the letters over and over before looking back up at them again and smiling, eyes shiny, “Yeah, me too.”

LaFontaine presses a soft kiss to Perry’s hairline just as their girlfriend closes the baby book, “I think we’ve done enough work tonight, don’t you?”

LaFontaine smiles, hoping the thud of their heart isn’t too loud against Perry’s ear, “I agree, boss.”

Perry laughs and buries her face into LaFontaine’s neck, “You know I hate when you call me that.”

LaFontaine laughs, “I know. Making you mad is my favourite past time.”

Perry continues to giggle, snuggling closer into LaFontaine’s side, “Oh, please,” she yawns, “Wanna take a nap?”

LaFontaine shifts to fully wrap their arms around her, “Sounds good.”

“Call me boss again and I’m kicking you out of my room.”

LaFontaine just laughs softly as they feel their eyes drifting closed, the feel of Perry’s breath against their chest already evening out.

(See? Piece of cake.)

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"We should name it Charlie."

She sighs, "She would make a great Charlie. I've always liked that name for a girl."

Kirsch shakes his head, "Bro, our baby isn't a chick. It's a dude."

"Says who?"

He pauses and shrugs, "I don't know, I just like the idea of having a little boy instead of a little girl. And I know some chicks use that name, too, but it's way more of a bro name."

Danny stares at the boy in front of her, waiting for the punch line, but nothing comes.

"My name is Danny and I'm a girl. Is that more of a bro name?" She waits for an answer but all she gets is a hesitant look. She groans and throws her hands up, "My God, how did I get stuck with you again?"

"Well, Perry and LaFontaine were never gonna separate and Laura had said something about trying something new before moving to Carmilla's desk after I asked-"

She holds her hand up, "It was a rhetorical question," she sighs and opens her laptop to get a word document started, "Let's just try and do something productive, okay?"

Kirsch smiles at her and nods, "Okay, cool. But, um, for the name? Can we please stick with Charlie?"

Danny looks up from her screen, "Even if she's a chick?"
"Yeah," Kirsch scratches the back of his neck, "I, uh, don't care. Whatever gender. Just name them Charlie."

"Why do you care so much?"

His jaw locks, "I just like the name, okay?"

Danny quirks an eyebrow, "Sure."

Kirsch plays with the pen in front of him, "You don't ever think about having kids?"

Danny laughs, "Kirsch, we're only seventeen."

"I'm actually eighteen. Had to be held back when I was ten 'cause of - whatever." He shrugs again, "I don't know, I think it would be kinda cool. Being a dad and stuff."

Danny opens her mouth to say something but there's something in the wrinkle around Kirsch's eyes and slight quirk of his mouth that stops her.

"We can name him Charlie, okay?"

Kirsch looks up, a wide smile stretched across his face, "Yeah? Him?"

She rolls her eyes before looking down and biting the inside of her lip, leaning into her screen to cover the hint of a smile, "Yeah, well, if you're going to be such a sap about it then I don't care."

She can see Kirsch nodding in her peripheral,

"Wicked, thanks. That's super cool of you, Danny."

"Whatever, let's just divide up the project so I can go get in some laps around the track before my bus comes."

(Later, when she's editing their report at home and writes Charlie beside the line requesting the baby's name, she can't help but shake her head and smile.

Maybe it actually won't be so bad.)

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Laura paces outside the cafeteria before biting her lip and walking towards the table in the back corner. When she gets there she slams the sack of flour on the table in front of the pair of boots resting on the edge, "It's your part of the week to take the sack."

Carmilla doesn’t look up from the book she’s reading, “Okay."

She reaches into her bag and pulls out a notebook, “Here is the journal I kept documenting our experience with the baby every day. Can you make sure you update it daily for your days?”

She’s met with silence huffs out a breath, “Carmilla?”

Carmilla sighs, “I’ll try.”

Laura locks her jaw, breathing out her nose, "I'm going to need better than 'I'll try.'"

"Did you need anything else? I'm kind of busy."
Laura let's out a humourless laugh, "Right. I'll see you whenever," she turns and walks a few steps but can’t shake the heat burning inside of her chest. She stops and turns around, marching straight back around the table and grabbing the book right out of Carmilla’s hands, slamming it onto the table.

“What the fuck-”

“You’re not going to apologize for the other day?”

Carmilla raises her eyebrow and snatches her book, throwing it into her bag, “And what exactly am I apologizing for?”

“For bailing on your half of the project, for starters.”

Carmilla stands and throws on her book bag, picking up the sack of flour and journal, “Well, I’m taking it now so really I don’t see the problem. See you later, darling.”

She’s walking down the rows of lunch tables but Laura is hot on her tail, “We’re not done discussing this.”

“Is that right? I could have sworn we were since I had up and left.”

Laura clenches her fists as she speeds up to match Carmilla’s step, “You totally over-reacted and then ignored my messages all week. I had to basically stalk you to find you today. It’s really not cool of you to dump this whole project on me.”

Carmilla cuts past a freshmen - watch it, idiot - as she turns a corner, stopping at her locker. Laura is around the corner so quickly that she almost runs into her.

Carmilla quickly spins the lock a few times and whips it open, “Listen, I didn’t do anything wrong and we both know it. You’re just pissed off because I’m not as peppy as you are about this stupid assignment.”

Laura scoffs and crosses her arms, "Don't tell me how I feel."

Carmilla turns to smile at her, all trace of sincerity non-existent, "Feels like shit, doesn't it?"

Laura pauses, a sinking feel settling in her stomach. She plays with the end of her sleeve, "I'm sorry. For being so quick to judge."

“Whatever,” Carmilla shrugs, "It doesn’t matter."

Laura leans against a locker, "You know, I'm really trying here."

"And I'm really trying to explain that I don't care about any of this."

She watches as Carmilla sifts through the large pile of books in her locker. The sinking feeling feels as if it’s dragging her down. She bites her lip, “Can we just start over? I know you don’t care, but-”

The locker slams shut, “Like I’ve said before, you really don’t know anything about me. Can you just leave me alone for the rest of the week? The less we talk about this idiotic project, the better.”

“I’m just trying to extend an olive branch. Can you just take it?”

“You can take your olive branch and shove it up your-”
“Fine. You know what? I’m done with this project, too,” she reaches forward and grabs onto the flour sack, “I’ll take this for the remainder of the week.”

“Why? So you can just complain some more about how little I did?” Carmilla tightens her hold on the sack, “No chance I’m giving you that opportunity.”

“I’m not letting you ruin my grade for this class,” she pulls, “Let. Go.”

Carmilla steps closer and pulls back, “No. Chance.”

“Sweetheart,” a tug.

“Swee...heart,” a pull.

Laura tugs hard towards her, “Let go of our baby!”

A hardness flashes across Carmilla’s eyes and she shoves the bag into Laura’s chest, “Fine - take it. I don’t have time for your stupid games, I’ve got a spare period.”

“Great - see if you can maybe use the time to look up some manners.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, sarcasm dripping from her lips, “Fine.”

“Fine!”

Laura twirls around and stomps four steps before turning the corner and running right into one of the senior Zetas. She stumbles and tries to reach forward but the Zeta has already accidentally stepped on it, the contents of the sack already spilling across the floor.

“Oh - sorry dude.”

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no,” she falls to her knees and tries to sweep her hands on the floor to gather the closest pieces of white powder. She grabs the sack to inspect the tear when there is another set of hands collecting the flour in front of her. She looks up at Carmilla with a mix between a scowl and a frown, “Don’t make this worse than it already is by pointing out my shortcomings.”

Carmilla looks like she’s going to say something but purses her lips instead. She shovels a few handfuls into the sack before looking back up at Laura, “I’ll take care of this. You should get to English.”

“How did you-”

“You sent me a million texts this week with your schedule,” at Laura’s raised eyebrows Carmilla rolls her eyes, “Just because I ignored your texts doesn’t mean I didn’t read them.”

Laura smiles but then remembers that as of two minutes ago she vowed to hate Carmilla forever. She ducks her head to collect herself and feels Carmilla squeeze her wrist, “Seriously. You have class and I have a spare. I can handle this.”

Laura feels like she’s just gone through an upside-down loop on a roller coaster, “I can honestly help. It was my fault.”

Carmilla shakes her head, “It’s okay, honestly,” she looks down and Laura wishes she could see her eyes, “Most people don’t think it, but I am capable of taking care of some things.”

Laura watches as Carmilla carefully gathers small pockets of flour, slowly pouring it back into the
torn in the side of the sack. She offers a weak smile, but it goes unnoticed as Carmilla appears to be set on avoiding eye contact, “Thanks.”

Carmilla shrugs and continues to clean the mess up. Laura looks up at the clock and sees that there’s three minutes left until class starts. She looks back at Carmilla and gnaws her bottom lip between her teeth, grimacing, “Um-

The sinking in her stomach drops to her toes at the look of the first genuine smile she’s ever seen on Carmilla’s face, “Just go, Creampuff.”

“I’m really, really sorry!” She jumps up and starts, but turns back around to lean down and give Carmilla a one-armed hug, “Thank you so much!”

Carmilla stills and she jumps back up, “Um, that was weird. Sorry. I’m - yeah, okay. I’m going to go. This way,” she starts to walk backwards and almost knocks over another student, “Sorry! Oh God. I’m just going to go.”

She speed-walks down the hall and pretends she can’t hear Carmilla’s soft laughter from behind her. (She’s beginning to learn that the worst that could happen is not knowing what to expect at all.)

-----

“Can you tilt your head a bit to the right?”

LaFontaine rolls their eyes, “Do we really have to do this, Perr?”

Perry huffs as she brings the camera down, “If you want to get an A on this project, then yes.”

“But Perr,” they stop as Perry steps forward to fix a few stray hairs on their head. They smile at the look of pure concentration on Perry’s face.

“Sweetie?”

“Hmm?”

She steps back, “You were saying?”

They nod and adjust the sack of flour in their hands, “Right. It’s just - I think we can still get an A without doing a photoshoot.”

Perry waves her hand dismissively and looks into the viewfinder, “Just hold still for a second - the light is hitting you both beautifully.”

They try to keep a straight face and use every ounce of willpower not to roll their eyes outside of their skull.

"Stop making that face."

LaFontaine frowns, "I wasn't making a face."

"Yes you were. It was the Perry-is-being-ridiculous face."

"Oh," they smirk, "How do you differentiate that from my other facial expressions?"

Perry raises her eyebrow, “If you think getting me riled up is going to distract me from taking
photos,” she brings the camera up and snaps another picture, “then you’re wrong.”

“Perry—”

“Fine, fine. Why don’t you take some of me and the flour now?”

LaFontaine pulls off the baby carrier - yes, Perry actually bought one - and drops it abruptly onto the park bench, “Thank God. It feels like the weight of the world is now off my shoulders.”

Perry rolls her eyes as she passes the camera to them, “And people call me the overdramatic one.”

The moment LaFontaine slides the camera strap around their neck they hold it up and start clicking the shutter button repeatedly, pointing the camera in Perry’s direction.

“LaFontaine - I’m not even holding the flour yet.”

“Yeah, but you’re way too pretty to waste it.”

They smile as they see Perry duck her head and bite her lip, taking the opportunity to step forward and click a few more times for some close-ups.

Perry giggles and swats her hand, “Will you stop? Let me at least get some with the flour.” She picks up the flour out of the carrier and cradles it like a baby, “Okay, get some of me looking at the flour like I’m in complete awe of my newborn child.”

“Perr, I’m the photographer now so I’ll be making the artistic decisions while in this role.”

Perry blows out a breath, “Okay, what are your ideas then?”

“I’d like you to look at the flour like you’re in complete awe of our newborn child.”

Perry pauses and bites her lip, smiling, “LaFontaine-”

They laugh, “Okay, okay. I’ll cool it on the smooth talk. Let’s go over to the swings and I’ll get a few of you on there.”

They walk towards the swings and LaFontaine takes a few more shots on the way.

(Why not, right?)

When Perry is settled on the swing, LaFontaine clicks a few times before pausing, “Can I change your hair?”

Perry looks affronted, “What’s wrong with my hair?”

They smile as they step forward and let the camera drop against their chest, “Your hair is perfect in all of it’s curly glory. I just like it better when it’s down.”

They step in between Perry’s legs, reaching up to gently pull the hair-tie out and releasing her hair until it’s falling against her shoulders. They run their hands through the curls, tucking a few strands behind her ear, the tips of their fingers lingering softly along Perry’s jaw with every stroke.

They let out a sigh and Perry furrows her brows, “What’s wrong?”

“You’re just so unbelievably pretty.”
Perry’s lips slowly grow into the largest smile LaFontaine has ever seen. She bites her lip, “I really wish we could.”

They nod, “I know. Me too.”

Perry darts her eyes before reaching up with two fingers and kissing the tips. She hesitates before bringing them up and pressing them against LaFontaine’s lips.

They grin, mumbling against them, “You’re so adorable.”

“That’s you,” she reaches forward and drags her fingers up the strap of the camera, sending a trail of goosebumps along the back of LaFontaine’s neck when she slips the camera off. She nods her head to the side, “Here - come stand behind me.”

LaFontaine raises their eyebrows before they settle behind her, “Are you actually going to ditch the photoshoot in favour of me pushing you on the swing?”

Perry scoffs, “No. We can take pictures that way,” she holds the camera up in front of their faces and turns her head towards LaFontaine, “Are you going to scootch closer or not?”

They lean down so they’re cheek-to-cheek, all-too-aware of the heat that’s emitting from them. Perry starts taking some pictures, occasionally saying buzzwords to prompt them to change facial expression. LaFontaine laughs the whole time when they nudge Perry with their shoulder, “Babe, you’re not even getting the flour in these shots.”

They can see Perry smirk as she takes a few more photos, “I know. These are just for me.”

LaFontaine shakes their head and continues to smile for the camera.

(This may be the best project they’ve ever had to work on.)

-----

“Did you print the photos that we’re putting on the poster board?”

"Yup," Kirsch walks towards her, setting them down on his desk. He hovers beside her as she starts to scatter them on the board.

She’s debating on a placement for one when she feels something bat at her legs, "Can you please get this thing out of here?"

"Hey," Kirsch bends down and scoops up the tiny, grey cat, cuddling her close to his chest, "Her name is Selina."

Danny leans forward and hesitantly reaches forward to pet her. She flinches when Selina bats her paw at her, “There’s something wrong with her.”

“Naw,” he coos at the cat, “She’s perfect.”

“She hates me - and all animals love me - so there must be something wrong with her.”

Kirsch smirks, “Like I said - she’s perfect.”

Danny huffs and turns back towards the board, “Shut up.”

He laughs from behind her and she can hear the door open, “Project time, little buddy. We can
cuddle later.”

He closes the door and Danny raises her eyebrow at him. He scowls, “What?”

“‘We can cuddle later’ - you are such a sap.”

“Whatever, dude,” he brings his backpack to the windowsill and starts rummaging through it.

Danny returns to the photo placement when she sees something out of the corner of her eye. She stops her movements, “What are you doing?”

“Isn’t it awesome?”

She raises her eyebrows at the sight of Kirsch arranging the bag of flour by the window and trying to fit a baby shirt over it.

“Um, I have about a hundred words coming to mind but awesome isn’t one of them.”

He rolls his eyes and lifts it up to hold against his chest, looking down to admire it for a moment before looking back up at Danny with a wide smile, “Can you believe you can get your own custom shirt made for only fifteen bucks?”

Danny takes a deep breath, the words Proud Zeta staring her in the face, “Our flour baby is not wearing that garbage.”

“Garbage? Dude, I have like four of these on order at the mall.”

She shakes her head, ”Listen, I already let you name and gender our child. I even stepped aside when you wrote that cheesy lullaby for it-“

"Mr. Beckett told us to be creative!"

"I know. And even though it wasn't half bad, I put my foot down at allowing any child of mine - real or fake - to be a Zeta."

Kirsch lifts his chin, "Being a Zeta is one of the most honourable things you can be."

Danny scoffs, "Please, like it's anything to be proud of."

Kirsch steps forward and clenches his jaw, "Not cool, bro."

“Whatever,” Danny turns back to the poster board, “Let's just finish this so I can go home and forget this week even happened.”

“Works for me, Summer Psycho.”

She grabs some tape when she hears ruffling behind her. She turns and crosses her arms, “Seriously, take that thing off.”

Kirsch doesn’t look up, “Nope.”

“Kirsch-”

“Just finish the board so you can leave and I can catch up on Criminal Minds.”

She clenches her teeth together, “Take it off.”
He raises his eyebrow, “Woah, try to keep it in your pants, Lawrence.”

She groans and steps forward, beginning to remove the shirt from the sack, “You’re disgusting.”

He uses his body to shove her aside and pulls the shirt back down, “Don’t touch my shirt.”

Danny tries to take deep breaths but the burning in her chest is becoming too strong. She smacks the side of his head and hip checks him, sending him stumbling towards his bed.

“What the hell!”

She pulls the shirt off and upon seeing him bounce back towards her she shields the flour with her body, “Stay away from our child.”

Kirsch is behind her and trying to wrap his arms around hers to grab the shirt, “Give me the shirt.”

She squirms and folds closer to the flour, “Nope.”

“Lawrence, I swear to god—”

She holds the shirt out the window, “Just give me a reason to drop it - I dare you.”

Kirsch presses forward and grasps to reach for the shirt, “When I get this back I’m getting a divorce and taking full custody of our child.”

Danny lets out a laugh, “Yeah, right. Like you would win in a custody battle.”

He lunges forward and tries to bring her arms back inside. She’s thrown by his strength but extends forward, his words hot against her ear, “I’d be a better parent than you, that’s for sure.”

“Keep telling yourself that, bro.”

He tries to reach her hand one last time and she automatically reacts by pushing her body forward. The shirt goes flying out of her hand - only to be followed by the sack of flour tumbling off the windowsill by the force of their bodies.


“You’re the one that started it!”

“Only because you were being dumb with your stupid shirt!”

He leans toward her and stares hard before shaking his head and leaning down to poke his head out the window. After a few seconds he turns to look back at her, “You owe me fifteen bucks.”

She growls in frustration and bends down to look out the window with him. She lets out a long sigh at the sight of flour scattered across his lawn, “We’re screwed.”

“Dude, don’t worry - it’s not like it’s a real baby.”

She slowly looks to him, the tension in her body buzzing with the quiet anger that has been slowly building from the moment she stepped foot into this house. She quickly pulls back and steps to the desk, starting to pack up her stuff. He knocks his head on the window from leaning back so quickly, prompting him to wince and rub at his skull, “What are you doing?”

“You don’t get it, do you? Our whole project is ruined now,” she shoves some papers into her bag,
“This is going to completely tank my mark and I need to keep up my average.”

Kirsch bites his lip and slightly grimaces, “Come on, Summer Psycho, it’ll be okay.”

She turns towards him and counts backwards from ten to stop herself from decking him in the face, both fists clenched as tight as they can. It must be written across her face because he backs up and holds his hands up in defence, “No, listen, listen. I can just buy us a new one. I’m headed to the grocery store to pick up some stuff for my mom tonight, anyway.”

She glances out the window at the splatter of white across green and sighs, “Okay, fine. But I’m only trusting you to take care of it because I have a Summer Society meeting tonight.”

He nods and manages a smile, “I won’t let you down. Or let little Charlie down, either” he suddenly frowns, “Or I guess Charlie II once I pick him up tonight.”

She tilts her head and her face softens, “Thanks. I guess.”

She turns to open the door and halfway down the stairs she can hear his footsteps behind her. She stops to turn towards him, “Did you need something?”

He pauses, suddenly shy, “No, I was just going to walk you to your car.”

“Oh,” she lingers, uncharacteristically self-conscious, “I took the bus. My parents have the car today.”

He nods, “That’s cool. I can just drive you home, then.”

Before she can protest he’s past her and at the bottom of the stairs, grabbing the keys off of the hook and walking out the door. She rushes down and catches up to him halfway to the driveway, “You don’t have to do that. It’s not that long of a bus ride.”

He opens the door to his truck and rolls his eyes, “Which means it’ll be an even shorter drive,” he shakes his head as he gets into the truck, mumbling, “And people think I’m dumb.”

She huffs and stomps around to the passenger side, slamming the door when she gets inside, "I'm not dumb, I'm just trying to be considerate."

"Oh, that's new for you."

"Just shut up and drive, Dummy."

She crosses her arms and rolls her eyes at the sight of his ridiculously large smirk out of the corner of her eye.

(Okay, so this is bad. But maybe it's not the end of the world.)

-----

“Please remind me why we had to come with Ginger One and Two, please?”

LaFontaine whistles as they push the cart, Perry matching their stride and lifting her chin, “Because LaFontaine was nice enough to drive you here,” she frowns in Laura’s direction, “Even though I advised against helping you both cheat on your project.”

Laura bites her lip as she stares between Carmilla and Perry, “Can we just all please get along for the next fifteen minutes?” She ducks her head as she steps closer to Perry, “And it’s not technically
cheating.”

All she gets is a *hmm* in response, causing the growing knot in her stomach to turn a few more times. Perry walks down the aisle to grab a few items off the shelf and Laura speeds up a bit to walk next to Carmilla, “Do you think what we’re doing is cheating?”

Carmilla shrugs, “It’s self-preservation, Cutie,” Laura looks down and Carmilla lightly touches her wrist, “It’s either this or we fail, and I don’t really feel like having to be sent to the Principal’s office to deal with that.”

Laura nods, “Yeah. Right.”

Carmilla sighs, “I already told you a million times that I could take care of this on my own. If you want to distance yourself from this I’m giving you the out.”

“No, I couldn’t,” she takes a deep breath and straightens up, “I was the one who murdered our child in the first place. I need to be a part of the fix.”

“My God,” Carmilla smirks, “You’ve never broken a rule in your life, have you?”

Laura furrows her brow, “Sure I have!”

Carmilla raises an eyebrow, “Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah! There’s, uh…” she feels her cheeks warm, “Well, I think-”

“Please don’t hurt yourself, darling.”

LaFontaine throws four bags of sour cream and onion chips into the shopping cart, “She’s right: you are pretty clean.”

“I am *not,*” LaFontaine and Carmilla exchange a glance and Laura stomps her foot, “I’m not!”

Perry drops a box of cookies into the cart, “Please leave Laura alone.” She trails her hand along the chips, “And you don’t need those - I already have three bags of them at my house.”

“Oh, good to know,” LaFontaine grabs the chips and puts them back on the shelf, throwing five bags of barbeque chips in the cart instead.

“I have those, too, sweetie.”

LaFontaine smiles, “Wow, you’re really prepared,” they stack the bags back onto the shelf before contemplating the selection and then dropping three bags of nachos into the cart.

“I didn’t really mean-” Perry sighs, “Nevermind.”

“If the newlyweds are done discussing things that I don’t care for, can we just get to the baking aisle already?”

Laura tenses as she glances between Perry and LaFontaine, waiting for their reaction before proceeding. LaFontaine is suddenly very interested in the ingredients of the salsa they have in their hand and Perry laughs nervously, “We’re not-” she briefly looks to LaFontaine, “We just hang out a lot.”

Carmilla looks like she's studying them, “I noticed.” Laura looks to her with concern and recognition flashes across Carmilla's eyes, “It was a joke, Ginger Twins. Best friends since forever, right?” She
makes a face, “Frankly, it’s nauseating.”

At the sight of visible relaxation on her friends’ faces Laura lets out a long breath that seemed to be lodged in the back of her throat.

“How about Carmilla and I head to the baking aisle and we’ll meet you at the cash?”

LaFontaine nods, “Sounds good. Try not to drop any more sacks on the way back.”

Laura pouts - whether it’s more from their comment or the sly smile on Carmilla’s face, she isn’t sure - and sticks her tongue out at them as they push the cart away laughing.

Carmilla is already bound towards the aisle and Laura has to jog to catch up with her.

Laura watches her shift a little, “I didn’t mean to offend your friends.”

She shakes her head, “No, you didn’t. Don’t worry,” she hesitates, “LaFontaine’s parents are just really conservative so those kinds of accusations would start a whole lot of arguments. Like, even though it’s not true, just putting the idea out there would basically result in getting disowned.” Laura feels a jumble of words swimming in her mouth and despite her best efforts they keep pouring out, “It just really sucks, you know? They’re such great friends and just because they’re so close people assume things. People have their own perceptions but they’re just close friends.”

“Mhm. Close friends.”

Laura’s heart quickens, “Honestly, nothing.”

A hand stills her, “It’s okay. I get it. I believe you.” She stops them in front of the flour section, “Let’s just grab one of these so we can get going.”

Carmilla reaches forward to grab a bag but Laura stops her, “That’s it? You’re just going to pluck one off the shelf?”

“Um, what else am I supposed to do?”

Laura shrugs, “I don’t know. This is our child. Shouldn’t we put more thought into it?”

Carmilla purses her lips, “You have got to be kidding me.”

”Here, what about this one?”

She grabs it from the shelf and holds it up in front of Carmilla, waiting for a response. After a moment, Carmilla shrugs, "I suppose we could go with that one...if you don't care about the logo."

"What's wrong with the logo?" She inspects it briefly before looking back up a Carmilla with a pout.

"It's all faded and distressed. Do you really want one that looks like it's been living on the streets?"

Laura huffs and hugs the flour close to her chest, "I think it's beautiful."

Carmilla snorts, "It's ugly."

She smacks her lightly on the arm, "It gives it character."

"Oh please, honey," Carmilla rolls her eyes, "Character is a nice way of saying something is damaged."
Laura smiles wide, "What gives you character, then?"

She immediately regrets the words as soon as Carmilla stiffens. She backtracks, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that."

Carmilla looks at her with fire in her eyes, "We all mean the things that we say," she laughs, hollow and dark, "God, I'm such an idiot."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

She shakes her head, "Nothing. Let's just take that one and go."

She's down the aisle but Laura is quick to keep up this time, "No, I honestly didn't mean it. I'm sorry. You've just got the whole broody, mysterious thing going on. I was trying to make a joke," she winces, "Which I realize now that I suck at and will never attempt again."

"Just drop it, I don't care."

"Carmilla, please-"

Carmilla turns sharply towards her, the words just stop hot off her tongue; unfortunately, Laura has never been good with reflexes and the action catches her off guard, forcing her to stumble forward a few steps. Carmilla is quick to brace her arms around Laura, saving them from another accident.

"Jesus, you're completely useless. Give me that thing."

Carmilla harshly grabs the flour and speed-walks towards the front of the store. Laura stands in place for a few seconds, navigating through the churning feeling still floating in the bottom of her stomach.

She approaches the cash register with caution, LaFontaine raising their eyebrow as they glance between the two.

She subtly shakes her head at them and steps forward, pulling out her wallet and turning towards Carmilla, "I'll get this."

Carmilla is silent, her jaw tense as she looks down at her phone.

Perry puts the last bag of chips on the conveyor belt, looking up hesitantly, "Um, she's already paid for it. We just have to pay for our stuff and then we can go."

"Oh," Laura looks between the three of them and can feel her chest tightening. Carmilla won't look up from her phone, Perry is nervously counting change and LaFontaine is staring so hard at the magazine rack that she feels like it will spontaneously combust at any moment from the intensity of the gaze. The blanket of tension wrapped tightly around the group is suffocating, closing fast and hard around Laura's throat. The cool, tingling feeling in the pit of her stomach has grown ten-fold and she struggles to control it before she loses her lunch.

She takes a small step towards Carmilla, her voice dropped to a whisper, "Carmilla-"

“Hey, are your doors unlocked?”

“Uh,” LaFontaine looks like a deer caught in headlights, “Yeah. I never lock it. The value of that thing is probably in the negatives by now, so it’s almost better if it’s stolen so I can cash in on insurance.”

Carmilla nods and picks up the grocery bag with the flour, “Perfect. I’ll go wait in the car.”
Laura steps forward but she’s off and bound towards the parking lot in a flash. LaFontaine raises their eyebrows and Perry offers her a sympathetic smile.

They gather the grocery bags but before they move to leave LaFontaine stops them, “Okay, what the hell was that?”

“LaFontaine-”

“No, come on. We leave them alone for 2.5 seconds and they’re already ready to tear each other’s heads off.”

Perry rolls her eyes, “Well if anyone is going to be tearing off a head it’ll be Carmilla,” Laura gives her a look and Perry’s eyes widen, “What? She’s just...very to herself and clearly has a bit of a mean streak. Plus, she wears all those black layers and it’s 85 degrees outside. There’s something off about her.”

LaFontaine scoffs, “You’re going to judge her because of what she’s wearing? Come on, Perr - you’re better than that.”

“She just seems dangerous in a teenage-angst-I-can-beat-you-up sort of way!”

Laura rolls her eyes and leaves them to their bickering. As she leaves the cash she can see Kirsch approaching her, a large grin stretched across his face.

“Laura, hey!” He waves and and jogs a bit to catch up to her.

“Oh, hey, Kirsch. You doing the grocery run this week?”

He nods, “Yeah. Mom’s working late again, you know how it is,” he glances around before leaning in closer, “I’m kind of here on other business, though.”

Laura quirks her eyebrow as he opens up a grocery bag to reveal a new bag of flour. She bites the inside of her lip to keep from laughing. Oddly enough, the sight of that brown sack of powder helps to take a bit of the guilt off of her shoulders.

(At least she wasn’t the only one to mess up, right?)

“Um, you do realize that you bought the wrong brand, right?”

Kirsch’s eyes go wide, “Fuck. Are you serious?”

She winces, “Yeah, sorry. But I’m sure you could go return it.”

“I guess,” he moves the grocery bags to one hand and takes out his phone, “Shit. I was supposed to be home ten minutes ago because I’m already late for a Zeta meeting.” He glances to the baking aisle and then back at Laura, “Do you really think Danny will notice?”

She laughs, “Shouldn’t you be more worried if Mr. Beckett will notice?”

He shakes his head, “Trust me. I should be more worried about her.”

She debates telling him the truth but doesn’t have the heart to put a frown on that puppy dog face, “I’m sure she won’t noticed. You’re smart - you’ll figure something out.”

His face lights up and he grins, nodding, “Yeah? Cool. You’re right,” he pockets his phone with a newfound look of determination on his face, “I’ve got this. I really have to go, though - see you in
He rushes out the door just as she glances behind her to see if LaFontaine and Perry are still at it. She sighs at the sight of them -

(“She’s probably harmless, Perr.”)

“We don’t know anything about her. For all we know she’s in a biker gang.”

“Okay, that’s it. We aren’t watching any more Sons of Anarchy.”)

and makes her way outside towards the car.

She bites her lip before reaching for the door - but huffs as she pulls at the handle with no luck.

Laura taps on the window. Nothing. She peers inside and can see Carmilla swiping at her phone.

She knocks a bit harder this time, “Carmilla, come on. Let me in.”

She watches as Carmilla continues to occupy herself with her phone.

She sighs as she leans her side against the car door, “I’m sorry, okay? I keep judging you and I don’t know why I do it but sometimes I just go on these rants and can’t control the words coming out of my mouth. I just talk and talk and talk and by the end of it I’m like, ‘did I really just say that?’ and sure enough - yes, I did just say that. And I am literally doing it right now,” she groans as she turns to bang her forehead against the side of the car.

After a few hits she hears the car door unlock. She jolts back and looks inside, only to see Carmilla still on her cell. She glances down at the lock and sees that they actually have been opened, so she quickly gets in the car before Carmilla can change her mind.

“Um, thanks. Sorry for what I said inside. And for rambling out there,” she pauses, closing her eyes and thudding the back of her head against the seat, “And for rambling right now.”

She keeps her eyes closed for a few seconds before risking a peak out of one eye to assess the situation of the possibly-hating-possibly-forgiving girl sitting next to her. Carmilla is swiping aimlessly through her text messages, but there is a shadow of a smile dancing at the edge of her lips. Laura takes this as a good sign and decides that it’s safe to open both eyes. She stares at the other girl, smiling at Carmilla’s attempt to hide her amusement.

Carmilla must have felt the stare because she glances to the side and rolls her eyes, “Stop looking at me like I solved world hunger. I just opened a door.”

“I really am sorry.”

Carmilla sighs, “I only opened it because you sounded like you were about to have a stroke.”

Laura shrugs, “Whatever. It was still nice.” She bites her lip before turning in her seat to fully face Carmilla, “Listen, Carmilla-”

The front doors of the car open, Perry huffing as she gets in and throws the grocery bags unceremoniously onto Laura’s lap.

LaFontaine gets in the car and glances at the back seat before turning to Perry, “See? They didn’t kill each other.”
“I didn’t say they were going to kill each other. I was just... worried.”

Laura holds the groceries close to her chest, slowly shrinking behind them.

Carmilla shifts in her seat, “You geniuses know we can both hear you, right?”

“Right, right. Sorry,” LaFontaine looks at Laura through the rear-view mirror and Laura reminds herself to hit them on the side of the head later for the smug expression they’re giving her right now.

“Whatever,” Carmilla looks at her nails, “Just put on some music so this car ride can be slightly less painful.”

“Oh, can you plug in my-”

LaFontaine holds up their hand, “Laura, we’re not listening to One Direction again,” they change gears and turn to look out the back window as they reverse, “Not after last time.”

Carmilla crosses her arms and smirks, “Wow, I never thought I’d say it, but I agree with Ginger One.”

Perry turns and opens her mouth in shock, “Wait, why aren’t I Ginger One?”

Laura slouches in her seat and pouts, “Can we just head home? You’re all no fun.”

They all laugh - including Carmilla - and Laura can’t help turning her pout into the tiniest smile.

(She's also starting to learn that even when the worst possible things happen that there will always be those little moments of saving grace.)

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From: “Terrance Beckett” <tbeckett@silashigh.edu.com>

Sent: 2014-09-02 5:23 PM

To: “Laura Hollis” <lhollis@silashigh.edu.com>; “Carmilla Karnstein” <ckarnste@silashigh.edu.com>

Subject: Flour Baby Project - Extra Credit

Hello Carmilla and Laura,

Unfortunately, I will not be able to give you a passing grade for your project at this time due to the state of your flour baby in class today. I'm very disappointed at your attempt to try and cheat the project by replacing your bag of flour. I purposely did not disclose that all bar codes were recorded for the assigned sacks for this very reason. Even though Carmilla took full blame for the injury, this was a collaborative project and responsibility needs to be shared by both parties. It was very clear that the weight of the work done was not distributed equally, and in order to make up for this you have both been assigned the extra credit portion of this project at the school day care facility.

I was hoping that you both would be able to collaborate on this project but am disappointed to see that this was not the case. I hope to see better results after you report back from your time at the day care.
If you have any questions feel free to reach out,

Mr. Beckett.

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From: Terrance Beckett” <tbeckett@silashigh.edu.com>

Sent: 2014-09-02 5:38 PM

To: “Danny Lawrence” <dlawrenc@silashigh.edu.com>; “Brody Kirsch” <bkirsch@silashigh.edu.com>

Subject: Flour Baby Project - Extra Credit

Hello Danny and Brody,

Unfortunately, I will not be able to give you a passing grade for your project at this time due to the accident regarding your flour baby. I expected more from the both of you, and am disappointed at your half-hearted attempt to replace your flour sack upon destruction of your assigned one. This may seem unfair because it was just a bag of flour, but remember that the purpose of this assignment was to treat this with as much realism as possible.

The manner in which you handled this exposition today through the fighting and blame-games is not something that will be tolerated in my classroom in the future. Although the remainder of your written work on the project was well done (Danny - great job with the budgeting; Brody - amazing initiative with creating a mock tax return file and original lullaby), the physical maintenance of the flour was a large portion of the grade. Remember - this was your baby, after all.

In order to make up for this you have both been assigned the extra credit portion of this project at the school day care facility. Please remember that you are supposed to be role models for these children, so I expect your personal issues to be kept out of that environment.

If you have any questions feel free to ask,

Mr. Beckett

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From: Terrance Beckett” <tbeckett@silashigh.edu.com>

Sent: 2014-09-02 6:06 PM

To: “Lola Perry” <lperry@silashigh.edu.com>; “Susan LaFontaine” <slafonta@silashigh.edu.com>

Subject: Flour Baby Project - Extra Credit

Hello Lola and LaFontaine,

Congratulations again on an amazing presentation today. Thank you for allowing me to keep a copy of your written report as an example to show to the students taking this course next semester.
Since you did so well on the project, I’d like to invite you to an extra credit opportunity taking place at the school’s day care facility. Some students who require the credit to bump up their grade will be chaperoning the children and I think it would be very helpful if you both were there to set a great example for your fellow students. The time spent at the facility will go towards your final grade.

Please let me know if you will be able to attend this session.

Thanks,

Mr. Beckett

P.S. I am still in awe over the personal photos attached to the project - they were a great personal touch!
Lost and Found

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 1, or the one where they supervise a day care.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Can you pass me a green crayon, please?”

Laura reaches across the table and plucks the crayon from the bin, passing it to the little girl, “Here you go.”

The girl smiles wide, two large gaps in place of her front teeth, “Thanks.”

She smiles back, eyes hovering briefly across the room. They fall unsurprisingly on the same two people she’s been passively aggressively watching for the past forty-five minutes. In the corner of the room, huddled close together and playing in the indoor sandbox, are Carmilla and a little boy from the day care.

When they first arrived to the room Carmilla was quick to detach herself from Laura’s side - much to her disappointment. She had tried talking to her ever since they got Mr. Beckett’s email but the other girl was avoiding her at all costs.

It would be one thing for Carmilla to avoid her today and go sulk in the corner with a book on Socrates or Plato or Descartes.

(But it’s a whole other thing for her to waltz into this classroom and actually be pleasant and caring towards the children. It wasn’t even upon someone else’s prompting; as the rest of the children gravitated into groups to start playing, Carmilla wandered towards the little boy who was sitting alone in the back. After a few minutes of observation - she was not spying - she saw that Carmilla coaxed the boy to the sandbox and started helping him build a sandcastle.

(Caring? Smiling? Being Nice?)

What was she trying to pull?"

So in a twist of events, Laura is the one sitting and brooding at a craft table. She sighs as she turns to the little girl beside her, “Madison, can I ask you a question?”

“Mhm,” the girl nods along, tongue darting out as she focuses on colouring in the shapes on the page.

“Have you ever said something mean to a friend and they got mad at you?”

“Oh, yeah,” she nods more eagerly now, “Tons of times.”
“Hmm,” Laura grabs a purple crayon and starts drawing swirls around the little blue box on her piece of paper, “So what did you do?”

The little girl looks up at her and scrunches her nose, “I said ‘sorry’, duh.”

Laura smiles sadly, her glance lingering again over Madison’s shoulder and falling on Carmilla high-fiving the little boy she’s playing with.

She feels a soft tap on her hand and she looks back towards Madison, “Yeah?”

“I said did you say sorry to your friend?”

Laura drops the crayon and brings her hand up to rest her chin on. She slumps against it, sighing out a long breath, “Yeah. She didn’t really listen to me.”

“Oh,” she shrugs and goes back to drawing, “That sucks big time.”

Laura scowls and tightens her lips together, “Uh, yeah. Thanks.”

Madison is silent for a few minutes before reaching for another crayon, “You could always go hit her until she listens to you. That works with my brother sometimes.”

Laura makes a face, “That’s... not the best advice for this situation, I think.”

“Why don’t you just ask your mom? That’s what I do when I have big problems. She’s really great at helping me fix stuff.”

The words hit her square in the chest, hard and fast, catching her off-guard. It doesn’t always feel like this: the rush of air leaving her lungs from being squeezed out by the tight cord wrapped around her chest; the large weight resting right on her heart that spreads throughout her body, making her feel both heavy and hollow at the same time; the loud pounding in her ears from the blood rushing relentlessly to her head.

No, it doesn’t always feel like this because most times she can expect this moment. She’s learned to have a sixth sense about it; this innate intuition at the back of her mind that is attuned to the topic. But sometimes - when her preoccupation with a stranger that could maybe become a friend is paired with the innocence of a child - she gets surprised.

“I, uh,” she takes a shaky breath, “I can’t really ask my mom. She’s not really around anymore.”

Madison looks up, “Is she on vacation?”

She feels her lip quiver and she gives the little girl a watery smile.

(No matter how many times she goes through it, it still feels like the first time.)

“No, she’s not on vacation,” she looks around the room, debating on how to explain this to a child, “She went to a better place a really long time ago,”- it feels like yesterday, if she’s being honest with herself -“But she’s still with me all the time - right here,” she taps at her heart two times before offering Madison a reassuring smile.

The little girl nods, “Oh, okay. My grandpa isn’t around anymore, either. I think it makes my mom sad so I give her extra hugs.”

Her smile is brushed with sadness, “That’s very sweet of you.”
She looks up at Laura and smiles, “My mom is still here, though. Do you want me to ask her what to do about your problem?”

Laura ducks her head, smiling softly, “No, that’s okay. I think I’m going to go figure it out right now. Are you going to be okay by yourself?”

“Duh. I’m so good at drawing I don’t need any help.”

Laura rolls her eyes and gets up, stretching briefly and shielding her face from the rest of the class for a moment. She takes a second to blow out some breaths, ignoring the dull ache that has taken residence inside of her chest. When she turns around she sees Carmilla do a hand-shake with the little boy before he gets up and scurries across the classroom. She manages a smile and walks towards them.

Carmilla is etching some windows into the castle and smoothing the edges when Laura towers over her, ”May I?”

"It's a free country, cutie."

Laura takes a deep breath before sitting opposite of her, "So, you're really good with kids. I would have never guessed."

Carmilla continues to pat at the sandcastle, smoothing the edges without looking up at Laura, "Another judgement from the tiny cupcake - now who is surprised?"

Laura fumbles with the shovel she just picked up, "Oh God, I didn't-"

"Relax," Carmilla blows out a breath, "You really need to learn how to take a joke."

"Right," she nods and musters something hopefully resembling a smile, "My bad." She draws random patterns in the sand, “You really were doing well with him, though.”

“Yeah,” Carmilla stares at the tower she’s smoothing down, “It's, uh, kind of lame - I know.”

"No, no," Laura shakes her head as she starts aimlessly digging, "I think it's kind of sweet, actually."

Carmilla’s lips quirk up into a small smirk, "Of course you would," she finally looks up and her smile softens a bit, "But thanks, I guess.”

Laura smiles but the moment they lock eyes properly Carmilla furrows her brows, “Have you been crying?”

Laura feels her cheeks heat up as she self-consciously rubs at her face, “What? I-What?” She shakes her head, “No. It’s probably allergies or something.”

Carmilla quirks her eyebrows, “Wow. Must be quite the allergies you’re experiencing... inside.”

She ducks down to inspect a tiny rock in the sand, hiding her increasingly hot face from view, “Yeah, how about that, huh?”

Carmilla just hums in response. Once she's decided her face has substantially cooled down, she pokes her head up to get in view, “So-”

Carmilla holds up her hand, “If I have to hear one more apology, don’t think I’m above throwing sand at you.”
“But if you would just let me explain then we can move past this.”

Carmilla puts her shovel down and runs the other hand through her hair. She considers Laura for a moment and Laura shifts under her gaze. Carmilla leans forward, "Listen, sweetheart, let me explain something to you - and please pay attention because I'm only going to say it once: there’s nothing for you to explain. I know how people are, so I’m not surprised,” she shrugs, “It’s life.”

Laura crosses her arms, “That sounds a lot like judgement to me.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Oh, yeah. Pot calling the kettle black, much?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “Just give it a rest. It’s not like we’re friends.”

The words sting and she’s not entirely sure of the reason. She dismisses it as the heaviness still weighing on her from her earlier conversation with Madison. She brings her knees up and hugs them to her chest, resting her head on top of them. Carmilla has managed to embrace the silence and has busied herself with the sand castle again.

“We could, you know.” Carmilla looks up at her and Laura fiddles with the fabric of her jeans, “Be friends,” Carmilla stills and Laura presses on, “Would that be so terrible?”

Carmilla stares at her for a moment, “I don’t know.”

She drops Laura’s gaze and leans into the castle, picking up a stray pencil to start drawing lines on the side of the tower, an intricate cobblestone pattern being etched into the sand. Laura bites her tongue to prevent herself from spilling any unnecessary words out of her mouth, recognizing for the first time ever that some people require patience. Carmilla continues her ministrations - the inner clogs of her mind practically screaming out to Laura - but Laura remains silent, allowing Carmilla to take her time before continuing.

Carmilla scoffs, “Did your mother ever teach you it’s rude to stare?”

“My mother is dead.”

Her breath catches in her throat at the expression on Carmilla’s face when she whips her head up. (So much for biting her tongue and keeping unnecessary words from spilling out of her mouth.)

Carmilla stares at her and even though everything is screaming at her to look away she can’t bring herself to do it. Her heart pounds against her chest and the ache pushes down against her heart, “I’m sorry, I don’t know why I said that.”

“Don’t be,” Carmilla hesitates, “I’m sorry, for you to experience that kind of loss—” her eyes drift to the people around the room before falling back to Laura, “I’m sorry.”

Laura let’s her knees fall and adjusts to sit cross-legged, feeling a warmth creep up her neck. She smiles and shakes her head, “It’s okay. Really. That was a little too much at once,” she licks her lips, “Especially for two people who aren’t friends.”

Carmilla studies her, Laura shrinking under her gaze.

(Shes tries not to read too much into the fact that Carmilla is taking her time to make any attempt at forming a response.)
"Alright, little ladies, bring it in," Danny waves her hand towards herself, ushering the girls into a tight circle around the spot she’s sitting on the floor, "What's our strategy?" She looks to the girl to her immediate right, "Paige?"

The little girl unrolls a piece of paper with random markings scrawled across the page with finger paint. She points to a few dots, "The boys will be at the story mat for a little bit while Captain Dummy reads them a story."

Danny clamps her lips shut to stop from laughing at the name they all picked up from her, nodding along, "Good. So what's our plan of attack?"

Paige points at another shape on the map, looking to the other girls, "We get the foam balls and wait for Miss L to give us the signal."

“Girls, please - just call me Danny,” she crouches down and leans in closer to the circle, “We’re all equals, okay? Come on, do you all remember what I told you when we first came together?”

She smiles at all the eager nods she’s receiving, “Excellent,” she claps her hands and grins, “So what are we?”

“Girls!”

She puts her hand up to cup her ear, “I’m sorry, I can’t hear you - what are we?”

“Girls!”

“And what does that make us?”

“Strong!”

She pumps her fist in the air, “That’s right! Okay, let’s put our hands in,” she puts her hand forward as piles of tiny hands pour over top of it, “Summer Society” on three. One, two, three-

“Summer Society!”

They wave their hands in the air and fall into a pile of giggles. Danny sits up straight and glances around the room. LaFontaine and Perry are building some blocks with a few kids on the learning mat (no surprise there) and Laura looks like she’s walking to death row as she approaches Carmilla sitting alone in the sandbox (finally). She catches Kirsch’s eye in the process. A slow grin starts to form on his face and he raises a challenging eyebrow.

(Oh no. This can’t be good.)

She gets up and walks across the room, Kirsch standing and meeting her half way.

“What’s up, Summer Psycho?”

She crosses her arms, “You’re planning something. I can feel it.”

He smirks, “Oh? Like you and your mini Summer Psychos were doing all huddled close together a few seconds ago?”

She shrugs, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”
“So you’re not planning anything against me and my little bros? All of those little chants were for nothing?”

She looks him straight in the eye, “Female empowerment is very important.”

“Right,” he looks around, “Listen, I wanted to talk to you about something.”

He motions with his hand towards one of the arts and crafts tables and she scoffs, “You can’t be serious.”

He looks at her pleadingly, “Come on, I’m trying to make things right.”

She hugs herself tighter, rolling her eyes, “Fine.”

They walk to the table and go to sit down, their knees awkwardly bumping into their chins. She laughs as he tries to adjust himself on the tiny chair and almost falls off, “Nice one, ogre.”

“Hey!” He glares at her as he sets himself upright, “It’s not like you’re doing much better over there.”

She grins but it’s immediately wiped from her face when the chair shifts a little and she almost stumbles forward. He holds back a laugh and she rolls her eyes, “Shut up. Just spit out whatever you wanted to talk to me about.”

“Right, right,” his overgrown arms fold over the table, his eyes downcast, “I wanted to apologize for the project. I said I would take care of the flour and I failed us.”

“Yeah, well, you only had one job. I’m not surprised you fucked it up.”

Kirsch’s eyes go wide and he tilts his head to the children behind them, “Woah, don’t use that language in front of my little bros.”

She stares at him blankly, torn between wanting to smile and wanting to punch him in the face. (She could always do both. Compromise is one of her strong suits.)

“Was there anything else you wanted?” She’s about to get out of her seat when he reaches forward and covers her hand with his, “Um, what are you doing?”

He looks her in the eye, the creases around his softening. (She signed up to babysit toddlers, not deal with whatever brand of stupid Kirsch is about to hit her with today.)

Danny shifts under his gaze and he leans forward to drop his voice to a whisper, “I really am sorry for what happened with our project,” he squeezes her hand a little and she’s thrown, “And I really am sorry for this.”

“For this?”

Before she has time to move there is cool paint dripping down her face. When she’s wiped the excess from her eyes she sees Kirsch grinning back at her, his hand finally removed from hers to raise a fist in the air, “Now!”

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“I wish I could fly.”

LaFontaine looks up from the structure they’re building and nods, “Dude, me too.”

The little boy looks at them and tilts his head, “Do you think when I’m older I’ll be able to?”

“Nope.”

He frowns and LaFontaine slightly winces, “Um, sorry Connor, I mean—” they sit up and grab some blocks, “Alright, so like, this is the Sun, okay?”

The little boy looks up at them, nodding, “Okay. Is it hot?”

LaFontaine furrows their brow, “Uh, yeah. But - okay, that’s not the point. So, this is the Sun,” they hold up the block, “And then this,” they bring up another smaller block, “Is the Earth.”

“Where we live.”

They smile, “Yes, where we live. So, see how this block is bigger than the other?” Connor nods so LaFontaine continues, “Right. So since the Sun is bigger than the Earth, it—”

“But the Sun is so small.”

“No, no - the Sun is huge.”

Connor shakes his head, “Nuh-uh, I see it in the sky every day and it’s so small. Have you ever seen the Sun?”

They sigh, “Of course—”

“Then why did you say it was so big?”

LaFontaine draws a long breath in through their nose, “Because I’m an adult and I’m right, okay?”

Connor makes a face, mumbling, “You don’t even know how big the Sun is—”

“Anyway,” they hold up the blocks, “So, the thing that keeps us on the ground is gravity.”

“I thought our feet keep us on the ground.”

“The thing that keeps us on the ground is gravity,” they pause to take a deep breath, mentally noting that Perry’s plan to have four children will have to be significantly dropped to a maximum of two. “So, gravity is the force of attraction between two objects.”

Connor looks up at them with a confused face, “Um, think of it kind of like a magnet. Have you ever played with magnets?” He nods. Thank God. “Okay, great. So it’s kind of like that. You know how they’re drawn to each other? That’s kind of how gravity works.”

Their eyes drift up to Perry on the other end of the carpet floor, animatedly playing charades with a few of the other day care children, “There is this force - this strong pull that kind of brings things together. And you can fight it as much as you want, but the pull is so strong that there’s no way you’ll win. So you’re stuck together, but it’s really great because it keeps you grounded.”

Connor whines, “But I don’t want to be on the ground. I want to fly.”

Perry catches their gaze and smiles at them, “Sometimes it feels like flying.”
“What?”

LaFontaine looks down and shakes their head, “Nevermind. Um, so the Sun and the Earth,” they hold the blocks up again, “The Sun is bigger than the Earth, so it helps pull the Earth close around it so that our planet doesn’t just get lost in outer space,” they twirl the blocks a few times, “And see this little dot on the Earth block?” Connor nods, “That’s us. Little humans. So because the Earth is way bigger than us, it pulls us close to the ground so that we don’t go floating around, either.”

Connor frowns and throws his chin into his hands, “I hate gravity.”

LaFontaine laughs as Perry crawls over with a few of the kids, “Are you ruining people’s lives with science again?”

They smirk, “You say ruin, I say improve.”

Perry rolls her eyes and rubs at Connor’s back, “Did LaFontaine say something mean?”

LaFontaine tries to hold back a grin at the placating smile on Perry’s face. Connor sighs, “No, she was just telling me about gravity. And it really sucks.”

(It’s only three little letters, but it feels like a slap each time.)

One of the little girl’s eyes widen, “You shouldn’t say the s word in front of her.”

(Another slap).

Connor groans, “It’s not a bad word. She wouldn’t care anyways. She’s not our teacher.”

(Another. And another.)

They stare at the blocks in their hands, a chill washing over them. They put the blocks down and ball their hands up, the edges of their nails digging into their palm. Focus on the breath. Not the words. The breath; not the words.

Perry shifts closer, a look of concern written all over her face, “Hey, kids, do you want to play a new game?”

The children nod enthusiastically, the previous conversation already forgotten.

(If only it was that easy.)

LaFontaine remembers their breathing exercises as Perry continues, “Okay, but it has to do with LaFontaine over here,” she points at them, “Can you all keep a secret?”

Their heart pounds in their chest, “Perr, don’t-”

She looks them straight in the eye, nothing but love and adoration staring back at them, “Do you trust me?”

“Of course.”

“Good,” she smiles then returns her attention back to the kids, “So, like I said: can you all keep a secret?” They all nod along more eagerly now, some of them moved to lean forward on their knees. Perry leans forward and puts her hand up to shield her mouth, stage whispering, “LaFontaine is a secret superhero.”
Connor’s eyebrows shoot up, “No way.”

Perry nods along. “Oh, yes. It's a big secret, though, so sometimes we have to talk in code when talking about LaFontaine. Do you all think you could do that?”

The children stare at LaFontaine, never stopping their long stream of nodding. LaFontaine feels the breath passing through their lungs, each inhale and exhale passing with increased ease.

“Perfect. So, for our game, I want to see how much of you can keep up with our code. Whenever you’re talking about LaFontaine, you say they or them or their. Whoever ends up saying something different like she or her loses the game,” she leans in and grins wickedly, “Plus, this way if you stay in the game we can remember who was cool enough to know the secret identity.”

They stare at Perry, the weight on their chest pressing down for an entirely different reason this time. Shame and self-consciousness and frustration are replaced with pride and adoration and love.

Connor turns to smile at them, “I can’t believe I know a superhero,” he turns to the other kids and looks around before leaning down to whisper, “They are so cool.”

LaFontaine wishes Newton and Einstein were alive right now so they could explain that they were wrong. They were completely and utterly wrong because right now they feel like they’re flying - soaring as far as the highest clouds with only the smooth sound of Perry’s voice to bring them back to the ground.

(Perry will always be their sun, drawing them back in and keeping them from losing themselves completely.)

They turn to Connor, “Uh, thanks, you’re pretty cool, yourself.”

He smiles wide before suggesting that he and the other kids go to the dress up chest to look for some superhero costumes. When they’re left alone they turn to Perry, “Thanks, that was-” they look down and can’t stop the smile growing on their face, “Just, thanks.”

Perry drags her hand across the carpet and hooks the edge of her pinky briefly over LaFontaine’s before retracting it, “It’s no problem, honey.”

They both smile at each other for a second before a large collection of screams startles them.

Perry jumps up, “Oh dear Lord.”

LaFontaine can’t help but keep smiling as they shake their head at her.

(If it’s the girl in front of them asking for four kids, maybe it doesn’t have to be completely off the table.)

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The other girl takes a deep breath before going back to her drawings on the sand castle, “This doesn’t mean I’m going to start listening to One Direction.”

"Huh?"

"I mean, if we're going to be," she sighs and rolls her eyes, "friends."

A warmth spreads in her chest as her mouth forms a grin, "Really? Okay. Yes. Got it - no One Direction. I can manage that," she pauses, "Except, their newest album-"
"Cutie, don't make me regret this."

Laura laughs, bits of the heaviness weighing down on her dissipating into thin air, "Fine, fine. I promise to make this worth your while."

Carmilla smirks as she looks up at Laura, "Don't make promises you can't ke-

A sudden chorus of screams erupt in the classroom as groups of colourful balls go flying across the room. They both duck to avoid an attack from the side and Carmilla groans as a few balls pelt the castle, leaving it a mess of chunky sand.

“Hey!” Carmilla lunges forward to grab the ball and throw it back to the other side of the room, “What the hell, little demons?”

“Carmilla,” Laura hisses, “There’s children around.”

“Yeah! Children that just ruined our castle,” she frowns at the ruined pile in front of her, “Skyler is going to be so pissed off when he gets back.”

“Gets back?” Laura looks around, scanning the chaotic swarming of children for any sign of him, “Wait - where did he say he was going?”

Carmilla shrugs, “I don’t know. He mentioned something about wanting to head home so I told him to take a walk instead.”

Laura stands up and gives the room a proper look over. There are only around fifteen children running around and it doesn’t take too long for her to realize Skyler is not amongst them. She glares down at Carmilla, "You lost him!"

Carmilla dusts her pants off as she rises, leaning into Laura, "Woah, slow down there, Princess. This isn’t my fault."

"You were watching him."

"We all are watching these kids," she crosses her arms and quirks an eyebrow, "Which means if I lost him then so did you."

Laura’s eyes widen, "Oh God. Oh God, you’re right."

Carmilla mumbles an as always under her breath and Laura scowls, “We need to find him,” Carmilla stands in front of her, staring hopelessly, “Like, now.”

She huffs, “I’m already starting to regret this.” Laura tries to object but Carmilla just grabs her by the wrist and maneuvers them through the running children towards the door to the hallway.

“Wait, wait,” Laura stops them outside the classroom, “Won’t we get in trouble for leaving the class?”

“Sure. But not half as much trouble as we’ll get for losing an annoying little kid.”

Laura opens her mouth and then shuts it, considering the options. She nods, “Okay, good point. Let’s go.”

They’re a few steps down the hall when Laura turns to Carmilla and smirks, “You know, it didn’t seem like he was such an annoying little kid when you sought him out to play when we first got inside.”
Her smile widens as she notices the way Carmilla tenses, “Shut up.”

(This friendship will be an uphill battle, but something tells her that it’s all going to be worth it.)

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In the span of a few seconds the small group of boys earlier huddled around Kirsch have begun hurling huge globs of paint around the room. She ducks as a stream of green paint flies over her head, “Kirsch, what the fuck?”

He laughs - that smug, haughty one that makes her want throw him into a wall - and leans down, “Again - watch your language, bro.”

“Ugh,” she groans out and spits a stray clump of paint that flew into her mouth. She can see the boys hidden behind the toy kitchen and caste sets, war paint smeared across their face.

She gets up and raises her hands, giving the signal, “Girls, now!”

The room is filled with a mix of flying paint and foam balls, a rainbow mosaic of chaos and disorganization.

She turns back to Kirsch and he has that raised, challenging brow again, “It’s on, Summer Psycho.”

“Oh, it is on.”

(‘This can’t be good.’

Well, she wasn’t wrong.)

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“Crap!” A large glob of paint hits LaFontaine in the chin and drips down onto their shirt.

Perry gasps as more foreign objects hurl in their direction, quickly grabbing LaFontaine and pulling them underneath a table with her. She pulls the tablecloth down to shield them from the mayhem happening outside of their new shelter, "I can't believe the absolute chaos that has become this classroom."

LaFontaine laughs as they try to rub a smear of paint out of their shirt, "This is why I stick to science. You never see competitive riots being started over molecular biology."

Perry smiles and let's out a soft laugh as well, "They are being a bit ridiculous." LaFontaine continues to pick at their collar and Perry reaches forward, "Here, let me."

She rubs at their collar, fingertips slightly brushing their neck every few seconds. They take in a breath and hope Perry doesn't notice the trail of good bumps they're leaving in her wake.

"This is going to stain," she frowns at the shirt and then looks up at LaFontaine, eyes drifting to their lips before looking back up, "You have a little..."

Perry hesitates her hand in front of their face and LaFontaine nods quickly, "Yeah, go for it."

She reaches up to cup LaFontaine's chin, lightly rubbing at the drying paint on their cheek. They feel a cool wetness spread over their skin and Perry slightly winces, "Oops."

They smile, "What's the damage?"
"It looks like I'm trying to cover your whole face in paint instead of removing it," she sighs, "I'm just making it worse."

"You can't make anything worse."

Her breath catches and LaFontaine takes the opportunity to stare unabashedly. They connect the freckles on her cheek, more mesmerizing than all the constellations in the sky.

"Babe..."

They lean forward, Perry's hand still warm on their cheek, “Close your eyes.”

Perry objects with her words but still manages to contradict herself by shutting them closed. LaFontaine leans forward and presses their forehead against hers, letting out a contented sigh. They’re so close to her, her energy is practically buzzing off of her skin. They allow their eyes to flutter close, too, focusing on the soft sound of Perry’s breath flowing in and out. It doesn’t take long for their breaths to sync up in time with hers.

Perry scratches at their jaw and when they pull back and open their eyes Perry is smiling wide, “I thought you were going to try and kiss me.”

They shake their head, looking down, “It’s not always about kissing with you. Just being close to you is sometimes better.”

Perry looks pained, pulling back suddenly and sitting on her hands. LaFontaine lifts their eyebrows, “What are you doing?”

“If I don’t put a foot of space in between us then I can’t be held accountable for my actions.”

LaFontaine imitates shock, “Kissing in a day care around all of these murderous children? How scandalous.” They pause to consider it, “Actually, that is kind of dangerous and surprisingly exciting.”

Perry laughs, “Please reconsider what you just said and evaluate how much of a dork you are.”

They shift closer so that their faces are once more an inch apart, “But I’m your dork, right?”

“R-right,” Perry gulps and they smile wider, leaning back again and smirking. Perry rolls her eyes, “Please wipe that look off your face.”

“Oh, okay,” they laugh and their eyes widen as they suddenly remember something. They reach back and pull a piece of folded paper from their pocket, “Speaking of dorks...” they pass the paper and wait for her to open it.

After a few seconds of looking at the drawing Perry shrugs, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“They reach forward to grab the paper back, holding it up to display the drawing. In messy crayon there are two stick figures - one labelled Perry and the other LaF - holding hands. There are doodles of stars and hearts surrounding the figures, but the most distinct imprint is the only neat cursive on the page displaying L + P in the corner. “You have no idea why a random child brought me this earlier today?”

“I have no idea - but kudos to the artist for such an accurate depiction.”
LaFontaine bursts out laughing, “Perr,” they point at the figures, “You look at least three feet taller than me.” They gaze down at the drawing and see their figure takes up half the sheet whereas Perry takes up almost the whole thing. Their cheeks spread further at the serious look on Perry’s face.

“I am taller than you.”

“Yes, but are you three feet taller than me?”

Perry looks down and shrugs, hiding a smile, “Tomato, to-mah-toe.”

LaFontaine bites the inside of their cheek and shakes their head, trying to have their own self-constraint around the girl in front of them.

(Playful Perry is one of their favourite Perry’s.

Which almost means nothing because there are about 82 versions of Perry and they’re almost all of LaFontaine’s favourites.)

They’re interrupted by a loud crash from across the room.

Perry pokes her head out from under the table - most likely to assess if anyone is injured - and pulls herself back in, “Do you think we should go out there and help them?”

LaFontaine scoffs, “They started this, they can finish it.”

Perry nods and smiles, shrugging off her cardigan. She drapes it on the floor in between them, taking hold of LaFontaine’s hand from underneath the cover, stroking the top of their hand with the pad of her thumb. LaFontaine’s cheeks hurt from grinning so much as they sit in silence and giggle occasionally at Kirsch’s war cry or Danny’s attempts to not swear in front of so many children.

(Hiding isn’t supposed to feel this good, but they guess with the right person it doesn’t have to be so bad.)

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“Let go of that!”

“No, you let go!”

Danny walks towards the dispute, ducking as paint and foam balls continue to fly across the classroom. The teacher should be getting back within the next fifteen minutes and she is going to kill Kirsch for getting something as messy as paint involved in this unofficial war.

(She reminds herself to ask Laura’s dad again about the sentence time for accidental manslaughter the next time she goes over.)

There’s a little boy and girl fighting over one of the foam balls. Danny walks over and crouches down, “Okay, what’s the problem here?”

“Danny, he won’t give me our ball back!”

Danny grabs the ball from both of them, “That’s not very nice to say,” she turns to the little girl, “And you need to learn to share with other people in the class.”
The girls huffs and crosses her arms, “You told us to show no mercy to the enemy! And he’s the enemy!”

Danny blows out a breath. In hindsight, maybe she shouldn’t have gone off on that rant while staring at Kirsch’s idiotic existence from across the room.

This is escalating and fast; she needs to think of something quickly before something else happens.

“Ow!” The little girl goes tumbling to the ground at the rough shoving hands of the boy. She looks up at Danny with tears in her eyes and - okay, she is in way over her head.

“Hey, hey - it’s okay.”

She reaches down to help her up when there’s a large figure towering over them, “Woah, not cool, bro.”

“K-man! I got the ball back for us!”

Kirsch looks down at him and shakes his head, “I saw what you just did, buddy. You can’t do that.”

Danny fully sits on the floor, picking the now-crying girl into her lap and letting her find comfort in her shoulder.

The boy scowls, “She asked for it. She wouldn’t give me the ball back.”

Kirsch crouches down to their level and shakes his head again, “Doesn’t matter. No Zeta resorts to violence except in cases of self-defence. We already went over this when I explained some of the key bro rules.”

“Yes, looks like those rules worked out so great for you.”

Kirsch snaps his head up, “Yeah, don’t think I didn’t hear your little Summer Society gospel about not showing mercy.”

Danny looks down to both shield her rolling eyes and to hide her pink cheeks because he does have a point.

(He runs her hand over her forehead, briefly checking her temperature because Kirsch is actually starting to make sense.)

He puts his hand on the boy’s shoulder, “You’ve gotta say sorry to this little one over here,” he gestures at the pile of hurt mess in her lap, “And you have to mean it.”

“Ugh,” the boy crosses his arms and Kirsch nudges him forward, “I don’t want to.”

“Chris, come on. You know what’s right.”

Chris rolls his eyes before sighing, “Fine.” He steps forward and mumbles out an apology. Kirsch raises his eyebrows at him and convinces him to try it again with some emotion this time. It takes about six tries, but he finally gives one that is up to Kirsch’s standards. When he’s done Kirsch sends him to the corner of the room for a time out which results in the loudest stomping Danny has ever heard.

Kirsch kneels forward, leaning in close, “Hey, Hannah. How are you feeling?” She snuggles closer into Danny’s shoulder, soft snifflles heard through the fabric of her sweater. Kirsch looks up at her and gives a sympathetic smile. He holds his arms out and Danny levels him with a look.
“I don’t really think she wants to go with you.”

“Come on, just trust me for a second.”

She scoffs, “Oh, yeah, because look at what trusting you did for me before.”

He has half the decency to look sheepish at that comment as he rubs self-consciously at the back of his neck, “Didn’t really think that one through, did I?”

“Yeah, no sh-” she looks down at the girl in her lap, “No kidding.”

He ignores her and reaches forward anyway, scooping the little girl up and setting her down on his knee. She rubs at her eyes and Danny’s heart breaks a little at the sight of her tiny lip quivering. He reaches up to wipe a tear sliding down her cheek, “It really sucks what he did to you, huh?”

She frowns and nods, “Yeah. He sucks.”

Kirsch and Danny share a look and try their best not to laugh. He puts on a serious face and nods, “Yeah, totally. Are you hurt anywhere?”

She looks down and swings her legs, “I think my knee is broken.”

Danny bites the inside of her cheek and admires Kirsch’s ability to take this whole thing completely seriously. He looks at her with concern, “Wow, that’s quite the injury. I’m captain of the football team, though,”- Danny tries not to gag - “so I’ve seen a lot of them. Mind if I take a look?”

The girl looks to Danny for guidance and she shrugs, nodding in Kirsch’s direction as an approval. She bends her knee up and he kneels down to squint at it, giving it a few light taps.

“Hmm,” he taps a few more times, “I don’t think that it’s broken, but I’ll need another expert opinion,” he looks in her direction, “Danny?”

She plasters on a fake smile, “Yes?”

“Will you do the honours?”

She stares blankly then looks down at the little girl looking up at her with such hopeful eyes. She’s not sure what he’s trying to pull here but ever since 45 minutes ago - or since meeting him in freshman year, really - she does not trust him. She pushes through the weariness and shifts closer, looking up at Kirsch helplessly, “Um, what do you need me to do?”

He laughs, “Well, you know, obviously,” he leans into her and whispers loudly so Hannah will hear, “Do the official knee check.”

She stares at him incredulously but notices that Hannah is watching them both with such wonder. She pretends to remember something, exaggerating her expression, “Ah, yes! Right, right - of course.” She leans down and taps at Hannah’s knee a few times, giving a few squeezes and pokes for extra measure. She turns to Kirsch, “Yup, just like you thought,” she faces Hannah, “No breaks.”

Hannah claps a few times, all previous indication of being upset completely wiped from her face, “Really?”

Kirsch smiles animatedly, “Yeah! Here, look,” he sweeps her up in one swift motion and after lifting her in the air he brings her down in a rush of air and giggles.

She lands soundly on both feet and she looks up at them in awe, “Wow!”
He nods, “I know. You are such a strong girl to live through such a life-threatening injury. Why don’t you go tell your friends how brave you were?”

She runs to the other side of the room to a group of girls huddled together at the paint station. Danny looks up at Kirsch as he kneels down to sit beside her, “Where the hell did that come from?”

He laughs shyly, “I coach the little guys on the junior team from the grade school around the corner in the summer,” he shrugs, “You kind of learn how to talk to them so they’ll listen.”

She nods and looks around, not quite sure what to say in response. She’s learned more about Kirsch in the past two weeks than she has in the past two years and frankly, she doesn’t like it. She distracts herself from her current internal crisis by taking a sweeping look around the surrounding area. She winces at the splatter of paint and destroyed toys scattered across the room. She looks back at Kirsch and catches him staring at her. He looks away and she tucks that tidbit away under the other multitude of things she’s going to forget about after today, “So you fucked up royally today.”

He looks around and sighs, “Yeah.”

There’s a heaviness to his defeat, and suddenly being right isn’t so important anymore, “But I guess we both did, right? You maybe just a bit more royally than me.” She attempts a smile and is surprised at the relief she feels when he returns it.

She’s eager to let this moment pass as quickly as possible, so she rolls her eyes and nudges him with her shoulder, “Stop being such a sap and help me rally these kids into the quickest clean up of their lives.”

He stands up and offers her his hand to help her up.

(They both look a bit surprised when she takes it.)

He cocks his eyebrow, “Wanna convince the mini Zetas and Summer Society chicks that it’s a contest to see who can clean the fastest while we sit back and watch?”

She can’t stop the grin on her face, “For once in your life, that’s actually a good idea.”

(Another thing to get added to the things she’ll try and forget after today - but what’s one more to add to the pile?)

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"I can’t believe you called your dad."

Laura nervously checks her phone for the seventh time in the past four minutes, "I panicked, okay? I can’t go to a juvenile detention centre," she bites her lip, "Do you think they will be more lenient on me because I’m the daughter of a police officer?"

Carmilla huffs as she opens up another random classroom door, “For the last time, we aren’t going to juvie.” She looks at Laura over her shoulder, “Prison, on the other hand…”

Laura’s eyes widen, “Oh my God, do you think it’s like Orange is the New Black? I don’t think I can handle that.”

Carmilla fully turns, walking backwards down the hall and smirking, “The possible violence or all of the lady sex?”
An eruption of fire ignites up the back of her neck, “The violence, obviously.” Carmilla’s smirk grows and she raises an eyebrow, the fire completely moving to Laura’s face now, “I didn’t mean that I can handle lady sex,” she pauses, considering, “Well, I also don’t mean that I can’t handle it - I am on the GSA and there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that kind of-”

“Holy fuck I have never met someone so virginal in my entire life.”

Laura balks, “I’m not.”- *Okay, that’s a lie* - “But that’s none of your business.”

Carmilla laughs as she opens another door and shrugs, “Whatever you say, cutie.”

They walk in silence for a few minutes, Laura fidgeting with the edge of her shirt. They check a few more rooms but have no luck. She checks the time on her phone and with each passing minute the rate of her heart picks up a few paces.

Carmilla lingers a little so that Laura can catch up, “So, is your dad actually a cop?”

"Yup, he's really overprotective but he means well."

Carmilla gives her a hollow grin, "He'd probably hate me."

"Well, I guess we'll just have to wait and see."

"Haven't even taken me out to dinner and you're already bringing me home to meet the folks? How very presumptuous of you."

At the rate of this conversation the heat on Laura's face is going to set off the fire alarms in the school. She attempts to roll her eyes and shrug it off, "Please shut up. I meant you'll see when he gets here to help us look," she glances at the time on her phone again, "Which should be in just a few minutes."

Carmilla suddenly stops and Laura stumbles into her. Her eyebrows are almost at her hairline, "Tell me you didn't actually tell him to come here."

"Why do you think I called him?!"

Carmilla runs a hand through her hair, "Because you're a prissy Daddy's girl?" Laura scowls at her and Carmilla sighs, "That was a terrible idea."

Laura wraps her arms around herself, "It's fine, he's not going to freak out...too much."

Carmilla goes silent and Laura kicks herself for the fourteenth time since they’ve started wandering the halls.

(She needs to stop counting things. It’s only adding to her stress.)

Carmilla seems to have retreated within herself and Laura wonders how much of a rollercoaster this friendship is going to end up being for her. She contemplates making an inappropriate joke as a last-ditch attempt to lift the dark cloud above Carmilla’s head but decides against it at the last second. Maybe she should just stay silent until they find Skyler.

“Carmilla?”

(So much for silence.)

Carmilla ignores her and goes to open the next door when it flings open, hitting her square in the
"Carmilla!"

She rushes forward and hesitates in front of Carmilla's face, wincing at the slur of curse words coming out of her mouth.

"You shouldn't say those words, they're really bad."

She whips her head around and sees Skyler leaning against the locker, hands thrust into his pockets.

Laura hesitates, "Um-"

"Is she going to be okay?"

"Oh yeah, I'm doing just swell, kid."

"Carmilla," she hisses out before crouching down in front of Skyler, "She's going to be okay. She's very, very strong. But are you okay?"

He nods, trying to get a glimpse of Carmilla over her shoulder. She frowns and offers her hand, "Here, come take a look."

She guides him forward, nudging Carmilla with her elbow, "Show Skyler how okay you are, Carmilla."

The other girl brings her hands down, a slight redness brushed over the scowl across her face, "Look, I'm amazing."

She nudges Carmilla again, leaning in to whisper, "Carm, he's scared."

She turns to Laura and stares at her, an odd look passing her eyes. She rubs once at her face before turning away from Laura and kneeling in front of Skyler.

"Hey, buddy. I'm honestly fine. I've run into quite a few doors in my time - that old sucker was nothing," he laughs and Carmilla smiles up at Laura before turning back to him, "So there's nothing to worry about, okay?"

Skyler hesitates, looking between Carmilla and Laura before lunging forward and throwing his arms around Carmilla's neck. It looks like it's thrown her for a second and Laura watches as she tries to balance herself. She can't help but smile at the surprised look on Carmilla's face as the boy squeezes tighter. She wishes she could take her phone out to snap a photo of the adorable way her arms are still frozen in the air; it would be great to use as blackmail later on when she tries to convince the world that she's the Queen of Apathy.

"When I get a call telling me that you're ten seconds away from filing a missing person's report, I expected to find a child that was - you know - missing."

Laura snaps her head around to see her dad walking towards them, taking off his aviators and resting them on the top button of his uniform.

"Dad! Hey, hi," she sees Carmilla get up out of the corner of her eye, standing protectively in front of Skyler, Laura frowns and turns back to her dad, laughing nervously, "Well, you know me - slight overreactions from time to time."

He hums and nods, tilting his head to get a look at the little boy cowering behind Carmilla. He takes
a step forward and Skyler reaches up to grip Carmilla’s hand. Laura’s dad smiles between the two, “Hey there, kid, my name is Mark. It’s very nice to meet you.” He reaches out his hand but Skyler grips Carmilla’s hand even harder. She gives no indication that this bothers her in the slightest and so Laura’s dad pulls his hand back and continues, “We’re really glad to see you’re okay. Why don’t we walk you back to the front of the school so we can wait for your parents to come pick you up.”

The little boy hesitates, glancing up at Carmilla before looking back at Laura and her dad, “My mom and dad are usually really late. I sometimes have to wait with the teacher for a really long time.”

Laura frowns again, both at the sadness in his voice and the way Carmilla’s jaw locks, “We can wait with you,” she looks up at her dad, “Right, dad?”

He nods and grins, “I have an even better idea: who’s up for milkshakes?”

Skyler’s face lights up at that, “I love milkshakes,” he looks up at Carmilla, “Can I get a chocolate one?”

“Um,” she looks around awkwardly, “That’s up to them, I won’t be coming.”

He loses the shine in his eyes and Mark shakes his head, waving his hand, “No deal. You’re a friend of Laura’s so I insist.”

Carmilla tries to object but Skyler is already leading her down the hall in what looks like a death grip. Laura risks a look at her dad and luckily he’s still all smiles.

When they’ve caught up with Carmilla and Skyler she clears her throat, “I’m really sorry for pulling you out of work.”

He shrugs and throws an arm around her shoulder, “That’s okay. I’m sure I have plenty of entertaining stories to pass the time while we wait.”

She scowls and shrugs off his arm as he laughs loudly at her. She quickly decides that she’s going to file calling dad in times of panic under something to never do again.

(Except: it’s the first time Carmilla’s smiled ever since her dad showed up, so maybe it’s worth it.)

Chapter End Notes

The prologue and this chapter were written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags #hsau updates for chapter updates and #carmilla hsau for general updates on the AU.
On the Corner of 1st and Amistad

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 2, or the one where Laura and Carmilla go on a double date with Papa Hollis and a small child.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So, as it turns out, Carmilla is actually a shapeshifter.

Yeah, it took Laura by surprise, too. Carmilla takes a new form somewhere between the daycare center and the diner, which she can only describe as aggressively Texan and probably belonging somewhere in El Paso, not Austin. It’s mostly empty and they take the table farthest from the cheap speakers that are pumping out a country tune, some song about losing the girl you love.

(Which, granted, doesn’t really narrow it down.

Laura really hates country music.)

Her Dad slides into their side of the booth first, smiling up at the waitress who introduces herself as Gabby. Carmilla, who is no longer the Carmilla she knows, but a perfectly mannered young woman who says ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, slides in next to Skyler.

Laura frowns as Carmilla folds her hands on the table, doing everything to avoid eye contact with her.

No, with her Dad. Carmilla meets Laura’s eyes for a moment and she sees it - the nervous glance towards her Dad’s badge. Her eyes close for a split second and she opens them again to stare holes into her placemat.


It’s not exactly a surprise, a lot of her friends have had their reservations when meeting her Dad. Police officers can be intimidating, and he does have kind of an angry resting face when he’s on duty. Laura tries to smile encouragingly because really, her Dad is possibly the least scary man on earth. She tries to twist her face into an expression that somehow communicates ‘don’t worry, he collects baseball cards and thinks it’s cool’.

She’s marginally successful. Carmilla relaxes, either out of genuine comfort or fear that Laura might be starting to see through her callous and indifferent disposition. Either way, Laura takes it as a small victory.

Gabby hands them their menus and lists the afternoon specials while Skyler pokes Carmilla’s side. Laura can’t hear what he says but Carmilla rubs his back for a few seconds and nods.

Definitely a shapeshifter. Laura has officially befriended a shapeshifter. Are they friends? That still feels up in the air.
Gabby walks away and Laura’s dad sets his menu down. “So, Laura, do you want to introduce me to your friend?” He smiles at them.

“Oh, yes, uh Dad... Meet Carmilla Karnstein.”

“Karnstein? Are you related to the Principal?”

Carmilla nods and fidgets with the silverware near her hand.

Laura sets down her menu. “Wait. You’re the Principal’s daughter?”

“Karnstein’s not exactly a common name, Laura.”

Laura realizes quite suddenly that the nicknames don’t annoy her as much as she thought they did, because this feels way too formal.

“Yeah, but - I just never-”

Her dad smiles and she can tell he's trying not to laugh. "She's right, you know. It's not exactly a huge leap." He nudges her shoulder with his own. "You'll have to excuse Laura here, she's a bright one but she's not so quick on the draw sometimes."

"Um, hello. Right here?" She gestures to herself as he laughs.

“It’s very important that your friend gets to know you, Laur. Adorable little flaws and all.”

“Shut up.” Laura smacks his arm with her menu. Which does, as she expected, absolutely nothing to stop him from teasing her.

Carmilla leans forward. “Oh, I’ve got to hear about the adorable little flaws.”

She’s smiling now, so Laura lets him continue. "Has she told you about what she used to think of Mount Rushmore?"

It’s in this moment that Laura decides no matter how much Carmilla is smiling, there is no way on earth she's going to let him finish this sentence. "Don't you dare."

He laughs. "C'mon! It's cute. She found out that rocks by the beach get their shape through water erosion, right?"

Laura buries her head into her arms on the table as her Dad ruins her life one word at a time.

"So she's in the middle of this great presentation in what, third grade? Where she proudly holds up a picture of Mount Rushmore and declares to the entire class that the ocean carved four presidents' faces into the side of it."

She looks up to see Carmilla laughing softly. "The ocean carved four faces into a mountain in South Dakota?"

"That's the one."

"Sounds like quite the miracle."

"No, the real miracle was she still got an A on that project."

"No, I'm pretty sure the real miracle is you're still telling this story eight years later." Laura says
through clenched teeth.

Skyler lays his hands flat out on the table and sits up. "What's Mount Rushmore?"

"It's a super cool mountain with a bunch of faces drawn on it." Carmilla explains, looking particularly animated.

(Laura suspects this girl will never be anything but a mystery to her.)

"Can we see it?"

Her Dad shakes his head. "No can do, kiddo. It's too far away. Maybe you can ask your Mom and Dad if they'll take you one day?"

Skyler deflates at this, just as Gabby comes by with a notepad in hand. She asks for their orders in a surprisingly peppy tone for somebody who Laura suspects is nearing the end of a very long shift.

“I'll have a steak and cheese sandwich and a loaded baked potato.”

Gabby writes down his order as he turns to explain. “This might be the only dinner I get tonight. The guys at the station decided I’m gonna be the middleman between the office and the hospital while they file these cases.”

Laura raises her eyebrows at him. “The guys at the station?”

He’s saved by Carmilla, who distracts Laura long enough to make her forget to tease him about his crush on a certain nurse. Skylar is pushing against her knee underneath the table and she picks up the menu, picking a meal at random. “I’ll have a... grilled cheese deluxe meal. Does that come with fries?”

“No, it comes with a house salad.”

“Oh. Screw that.”

Laura giggles a little and her Dad smiles.

“Can I get a burger and fries? Heavy on the fries.” She hesitates and adds, “And another chocolate milkshake.”

“Sure.”

“Oh, and a plate of mac and cheese.”

She waits on Laura’s order for a moment. “Just another soda for me.”

“Coming right up.”

Gabby spins on her heel towards the kitchen and Laura drums her fingers against the table. “Hungry?”

“Yeah.” Carmilla looks sheepish. “Starving.” Her eyes wander the empty diner, landing on Skylar. She licks her thumb and wipes away a streak of dirt from his cheek.

(Laura is developing a theory that Carmilla has been pod personed by some surprisingly nurturing alien species, because the girl sitting across from her is definitely not the same girl who couldn’t care enough to pick a baby name for a bag of flour.)
“Stop that.” Perry giggles as LaFontaine peppers her neck with kisses. “It’s only 5 o’clock, we’re nowhere near being finished and you know it.” She fixes them with a stern look, earning a pout in return.

The house is silent, save for them and the sound of her iPod playing in the background. It’s a Friday night and she knows that if LaFontaine had anything to do with it, they would be doing anything but studying. But spending the day at the daycare center meant missing four classes, and she was not about to let their grades slip in exchange for a few extra credit points in a class they were already doing excellent in.

“We have days to study for this, you know. The test isn’t ‘til next Friday.” They say with tap of their pencil against Perry’s textbook. “And it’s cellular respiration. This is super easy stuff.”

“Maybe it’s easy for you, but I’m not the one taking Advanced Biology ‘for fun’, alright?” Perry raises her eyebrows at them and gestures towards the spread of textbooks across the bed. Four, to be exact. One standard issue biology textbook, a lab manual, and two books they had pulled out from beneath LaFontaine’s bed twenty minutes ago. Not a word of it made sense to her, and LaFontaine was making it no easier on her with the distracting kisses and caresses.

They take one look at Perry’s expression and sigh, sinking into the bed next to her with a smile. “You’re right. You’re taking it because I have the best girlfriend in the world who somehow puts up with all my bio classes. Even though I know you stopped caring about science in the second grade when you failed that one lima bean experiment.” They shift, resting their head against Perry’s leg now.

(They aren’t wrong about that.)

“I did not stop caring, I just...of course, it’s still very interesting to me.” Perry absentmindedly runs her hand through LaFontaine’s hair.

“Sure it is. Just like verb conjugations, you know how much I love those.”

“Sarcasm doesn’t suit you, sweetheart.” She scratches LaFontaine’s scalp just behind their ear and smiles as they melt into the touch. She can almost hear a purr as their eyes close. “And maybe you’d love them a little more if we spent more time studying instead of kissing.”

“To be fair, you did kind of initiate the hour long break we took on Sunday.”

To be fair, they were right. But she wasn’t entirely to blame - LaFontaine had called her beautiful one too many times and they had spent the entire afternoon shopping with her mother. Six hours of pretending to be just good friends at school was usually her limit, anything extra was a very specific form of cruelty.

(This was a recipe for weakness on most days, and Sunday had been no exception.)

“And that’s all the more reason to study today. The semester’s barely started and we’ve been taking too many breaks. You know how midterms and finals always catch up to you, do you really want a repeat of last May?”

LaFontaine’s eyes open suddenly and they chew on the inside of their lip, a nervous habit. “You’re right.” Perry furrows her eyebrows at the response but chalks it up to pressure. It’s a fact neither of them can deny, especially LaFontaine. They’ll have to earn their scholarships if they ever want to leave this town.
She pats their head, a silent ‘get up’ signal. “Now, explain this to me. It goes; glycolysis, citric acid cycle, kreb’s cycle, then electron transport chain.”

LaFontaine sits up to move back towards the headboard, shaking their head. “No, the uh, the kreb’s cycle and the citric acid cycle are the same thing. They’re just different names.”

“Oh.” Perry runs a finger down the side of her textbook, skimming for a line. “But doesn’t everything go through the kreb’s citric cycle thing twice?”

“Yeah. But... no, actually. The glucose molecule that just went through glycolysis here,” They point to the purple shaded portion of the diagram, “Gets split into two pyruvates.... here.” Their finger traces the path across the page. “It doesn’t go through the cycle twice, but both molecules go through the cycle. So it’s like one pyruvate going through it twice.”

“Mmhm, and then?”

“And then it goes through the electron transport chain. That’s the one with the key thing I was drawing for you at lunch.”

“Could you show me again?”

“Yeah. ‘Course.” They take the opportunity to shift closer to Perry while doodling in her notebook. It isn’t subtle. Perry’s mouth breaks into a smile without her permission. “It’s not really a key but it’s sort of shaped like one. This thing here,” they circle a piece of their sketch, “Is in the matrix, that’s-”

“Inside the membrane, right?”

LaF grins. “Yeah. Yeah, you got it.” Perry smiles back at them, accepting a kiss on the cheek.

And then another.

And another.

She closes her eyes and shakes her head before leaning into them, pressing their lips together. “Don’t even think about it.” She whispers against their lips.

“C’mon, five minutes?” They laugh against Perry’s bottom lip and then pull back, meeting her eyes.

Denying them isn’t her strong suit, especially with those eyes (they never play fair), and unfortunately, LaFontaine knows this. She presses a finger to their lips. “That’s what you always say.”

“Hey, sometimes it is just five minutes.”

“Mhmm, when your parents come home it is. If not, it’s twenty minutes.”

They feel a rumble beneath the bed. Perry winces at the sudden shift in their posture. “Speak of the devil.” The garage door continues to groan for a few seconds, pauses, and then groans shut again. “That’ll be my Dad.”

Perry closes her textbook to ignore the way LaFontaine is pushing themselves away from her, readjusting their entire position. She tugs at a corner of her notebook, tearing out an inch of paper with a delicate ‘L+P’ scribbled on it in green pen. She pockets it just as LaFontaine’s father pokes his head through the bedroom door.

“Hey, kiddo. Oh.” He pushes the door open all the way. “Hey, Lola.”
“Mr. LaFontaine.” She offers him a smile and eyes the way LaFontaine is sliding off the bed one leg at a time.

“Hey, Dad. I thought you weren’t coming home until later?” They start collecting their papers from the bed, organizing them into a pile in their hands.

“Yeah, but Jim let us go early today. Tell you what, Jim’s a lucky, lucky man today.” He leans against the doorframe, hooking his thumbs under his belt. “Remember that wife o’ his? You met her at the faculty party. Nice gal, her son is that cute boy from across the street? Anyway, she just got new tits. And they are beauties.”

“That’s great, Dad.” They smile in that phony way only Perry can recognize. LaFontaine rarely smiles around their parents the way they do around Perry. There are no teeth in this smile, no light in their eyes. Just a nod and a quirk of their lips.

“Listen, why don’t you girls come help me out with dinner, your momma’s not gonna be home until late tonight. She’s having drinks with Christine.” He pushes himself up from the doorframe and points behind him towards the kitchen. “I’m thinkin’ pasta?”

“Yeah, sounds good, Dad.” He’s halfway down the hall before LaF speaks again. “Listen, you don’t have to stay.”

Perry pushes herself off the bed. She hears a clatter of dishes from the kitchen and allows herself to step into their space, their hands intertwining out of habit. “Of course I’ll stay.” It pulls a reluctant smile from them, their thumb grazing the skin of Perry’s hand.

“No! I don’t....” She rolls her eyes for emphasis and hopes she looks sincere. “Of course I don’t hate your parents. Your mom is lovely.”

“My Mom isn’t home.”

“Really?” LaFontaine doesn’t buy it but smiles anyway. “I do.”

They both know it isn’t true. Perry is lying and so is LaFontaine.

The truth is she does hate them, passionately so. Perry had believed her parents were the conservative ones up until the seventh grade, when LaFontaine had been grounded for two weeks after their particularly enthusiastic discovery of evolution. This was, of course, nothing compared to the grounding they received after they took one too many zeta-provided pot brownies and a pair of scissors to their hair last summer. Perry had trouble forgetting the look of sheer horror on Mrs. LaFontaine’s face when she laid eyes on their haircut. She doubted it was any easier for LaFontaine to forget.

Personally, Perry thought it was an extremely attractive look, thank you very much. This was not a sentiment she was willing to express to LaFontaine’s conservative, religious mother. The woman who was coincidentally also their English teacher.

She hated the way their parents treated them. Misgendered them. Bullied them. Changed them. Not that they knew, of course, what it did to LaFontaine when they tossed around words like ‘butch’ and ‘lesbian’ like they were garbage. Unnecessary waste impinging on their good christian lives. But she
could see the way each throwaway comment etched itself into LaFontaine’s skin.

“I’m staying.”

She was lying because she hated their parents.

LaFontaine was lying because they didn’t.

Somewhere in that enormous heart of theirs they had managed to find infinite forgiveness for their mother, who had probably said the words ‘Oh please tell me you’re not gonna end up one of them lesbians’ more than she ever said ‘Amen’.

(Which, for the record, was a lot.)

Perry understood the psychology of it, she knew they craved their acceptance of them. This was one part of their life that LaFontaine’s optimism outshined Perry’s for once. Science never applied to the hopeless causes.

“Thank you.” They kiss Perry’s forehead quickly before following after their father.

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There’s about a ten minute wait for their meals, a time Laura’s Dad fills with humiliating stories that Laura would rather not relive. Carmilla seems to enjoy them immensely, and Laura finds she’s been paying more attention to Carmilla than to her Dad’s stories.

She isn’t 100% sure, but she thinks Carmilla might be doing the same.

And it’s kind of cute. She’s kind of cute, actually.

In a ‘I-wish-I-looked-like-her’ kind of way.

Not that Laura could ever pull off wearing any kind of leather (she had tried in a particularly angsty twilight phase of hers in the sixth grade). Carmilla wore it well, maybe it was the confidence. Or the general lack of caring about anything. There was something attractive about that too.

In a gender neutral sort of way. Laura hadn’t actually had a crush on any boy since the seventh grade, but she was sure this was the sort of thing she was attracted to in them. Which was ironic, considering Laura cared far too much about everything. She supposed opposites did attract. There was something appealing about a person who cared for nothing but her. Perhaps it was a fantasy of hers, clearly derived from years of watching too many romantic comedies on television.

She observes in silence as they talk. Her Dad starts in on a new story, one about the time Laura landed in a neighbor’s recycling bin after a particularly impressive tumble on her bicycle. Carmilla smiles and offers up a story about how she managed to break both of her arms while tripping forearms-first into a cement wall at an alarming speed.

She can’t really believe that this is happening. Laura Hollis is actually sitting in a deserted diner with the most standoffish student Silas High has ever had the pleasure of teaching. And she’s smiling. And laughing. And occasionally doting on a seven year old that they almost lost.

(Frankly, it’s weird. But Laura’s kind of enjoying herself.)

Gabby returns with a tray of food and begins unloading it. “I’ve got a philly cheese for the gentleman.” She slides the plate across the table and Laura watches as Skyler’s eyes widen at the
sight of her Dad’s dinner. It’s almost comical, like something out of a cartoon. Laura’s soda and Skyler’s milkshake come next, followed by Carmilla’s enormous plate. “You guys let me know if you need anythin’ else, alright?”

Laura’s Dad smiles and digs in while she sips at her soda, eyeing the pair across the table. The fizz of the drink lingers against her tongue while she watches Carmilla spin the plate, her fries now facing Skyler. He hesitates, but with a nod of encouragement from Carmilla, grabs a handful of fries and begins unceremoniously shoving them in his mouth. She smiles at him and takes a bite from her burger.

This is the first and last bite she takes before spending the next eight minutes (Laura watches the clock as they eat) rearranging her food around her plate. It only takes two of these minutes for Laura to realize what she’s doing.

Her food circles her plate, the burger making its way closer and closer to Skyler's side of the oval shaped platter. He finishes off her fries in record time, and by the time the burger makes it’s way towards his side, she’s dumping the contents of her extra side of fries onto the plate.

Her Dad strikes up a conversation about baseball, something Laura can tell Carmilla knows next to nothing about. Skyler decides to speak up, suddenly getting excited over the Rangers or the Astros or a combination of the two as he shovels spoonfuls of Carmilla’s mac and cheese into his mouth.

Laura and Carmilla exchange a look. It’s almost playful and a little shy.

Skyler starts doodling in the ketchup and Carmilla forms a makeshift french fry moustache for the red face he's created on her plate. He doesn’t even notice, so Laura reaches across, adding a beard from a strip of uneaten lettuce on the plate. Carmilla smiles at her and it’s kind of beautiful.

Beautiful in an aesthetically pleasing sort of way.

They’re officially playing in the ketchup when her Dad raises an eyebrow at them and the edible face on her plate, who Laura has taken the initiative to name ‘Benjamin’. Carmilla wipes her hands off on a napkin and shifts her attention to Skyler, tapping his forgotten milkshake with an unopened straw. He ignores it, taking the glass into his hands and taking healthy sips from it’s edge. Laura admires his enthusiasm.

Thanks to Carmilla, he’s somewhere between his second and third milkshake (seriously, that cannot be good for a child that small) when her Dad’s phone rings. The call is short and he hangs up while taking out his wallet. “Ready to go home, little man? Your parents are in the parking lot.”

Skyler nods and pushes himself up onto his hands. They flag down the waitress and argue over who wants to pay. Carmilla insists on paying for herself and Laura truly admires her independence but shakes her head. “I’ve lived with him for almost sixteen years, trust me. He is not gonna let you pay.”

They compromise and he lets Carmilla pay for Skyler’s first milkshake and Laura’s soda.

(Laura smiles at this, because Carmilla was wrong. He definitely likes her.)

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Perry finds them in the kitchen together, LaFontaine searching through the pantry for something, and their father twisting open a bottle of beer. He frowns at the label: light beer. She remembers leaving it on the shelf earlier and smiles to herself.
There are regular beers in the back of the bottom shelf, thanks to her subtle rearrangement of their groceries. Her mother would be horrified if she knew how rude her daughter was, pulling the tiniest of pranks as a guest in their home. But if anyone was deserving of it, it was Trevor LaFontaine. She allows herself to enjoy life’s small revenges.

LaFontaine is hidden behind the pantry door when he starts to speak. “Oh you gotta hear this one, Sue.” Perry’s heart breaks at the way they don’t even flinch anymore, pulling back from the pantry victorious with a box of spaghetti in hand. “So, you know Amy, right?” He makes dramatic air quotes with his fingers around the name.

LaFontaine freezes for a moment and turns around to fill a pot with water from the sink. “Yeah... Yeah, I do.” The pot is almost full by the time Perry notices them start in on their breathing exercises.

“Wait, who is, who is Amy?”

LaFontaine lights the burner and moves to grab the pot by the sink. “Amy is a trans woman in my Dad’s office.” The words sound robotic in their execution.

“And that’s her fancy science talk for a tranny who chopped his dick off last April.”

There’s a clattering sound as LaFontaine almost drops the pot onto the stove. “Shit.”

Perry reaches out, but she doesn’t know what for. The pot is safely in place. Mostly she just wants to hold their hand. “Sorry, my hand slipped. Perr, can you make the sauce?”

“Of course.”

“So, anyway, you know Al’s a total ass, right?” He leans back against the counter and starts in on his story. “He’s been riding my team all week.” He takes a sip of his beer. “So I catch him in the break room today, drinking out of my coffee cup, no less, and I tell him, I say ‘Hey Al, how well do you know Amy?’ Now, he’s got no clue I’m talkin’ about a tranny here-”

Perry coughs. “Mr. LaFontaine, I really don’t think that’s an appropriate term.”

He stops mid-sip and makes a show of rolling his eyes. “Well, shoulda known she’d rub off on all her little friends. Relax, kid. I’m telling a story.”

“Dad, I don’t think she wants to hear it.” LaFontaine grips the counter and almost shakes their head, not once turning to look at their poor excuse of a father.

“You know what? Fine. Whatever. Call me when dinner’s ready, Susan.” He slumps out of the kitchen like a child and Perry momentarily considers pouring the contents of their spice rack, specifically the cumin, of which she knows he is deathly allergic to, into the pasta sauce.

The kitchen is silent as they fall into their rhythm, Perry reaching around LaFontaine for the parsley, LaFontaine drumming their fingers on the oven door handle beneath the stove until they’re covered with Perry’s hand.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to-”

“Don’t.” They look behind them, listening for the sound of the television. Seconds pass and the living room echoes the sound of white noise.

(Or as Perry likes to call it, baseball.)
“Don’t apologize. That was... kinda hardcore. Nobody stands up to my Dad.” They tug at the hem of Perry’s shirt. “You know the rule. We do not apologize for the hardcore.”

“Can we...?” Perry peeks around LaFontaine towards the living room.

They nod. “The Rangers are playing. He wouldn’t get up if the house was on fire at this point.”

“Good.” She smiles when they slip their hand into Perry’s curls and meet her lips. They’re in the middle of an overheated kitchen, the vent is making a suspicious clanging noise, and nobody actually knows just how completely in love they are, but it’s kind of perfect.

(When has it ever not been?)

As it turns out, when LaFontaine’s phone rings. Things are significantly less perfect when their ringtone interrupts one of the universe’s best kisses.

They pull away, checking their phone. “That’s my Mom, sorry, I have to...”

“Of course. The water’s boiling, I’ll...” She gestures towards the uncooked spaghetti and nods at them.

They unlock their phone and run a hand through their hair, smiling. “Hey, Mom, what’s up?”

Perry pours the box of noodles into the water and files through the drawers in search of a wooden spoon. She catches snippets of conversation while LaFontaine speaks.

“Yeah. Yes. He’s in the living room. He probably turned his phone off... Yeah. Yeah. Alright. Yeah. I’ll tell him.”

She feels a tug on her hand when LaFontaine hooks their fingers together absentmindedly while they sigh into the phone. “Mom. Mom... Mom, I’m sure it’ll be fine. He won’t forget.”

Perry pulls back her hand for a moment and is met with a pout. She shakes her head and retrieves the slip of paper from her pocket, slipping it back into LaF’s hand. “Yeah, Mom. Mhmm.” They raise their eyebrows and spread the crinkled bit of paper across their hand, reading the script.

(L + P.)

A smile spreads across their face and they slip it into the breast pocket of their vest. “Yeah. Love you, too.”

(LaFontaine is still on the phone with their mother, but Perry doesn’t have to ask who they’re talking to.)

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Skyler’s parents seem apologetic. His mother hugs him tight once they convince him to let go of Carmilla’s hand and his father addresses Sheriff Hollis wearily, explaining the horrible traffic they got stuck in. Carmilla narrows her eyes like she doesn’t believe them, and quite frankly, neither does Laura. She’s almost positive her Dad is suspicious too, but he shows no indication as the family drives away.

They walk in silence to where his cruiser is parked before he turns around and points towards the main road. “Do you need a ride home, Carmilla?”

“Oh. No thank you, Mr....Hollis.” They glance around at each other. The name sounds weird off her
tongue.

“Tell you what. Call me Mark.”

“Got it.” She shakes her head. “I’ll be fine, though. I usually walk home.”

“It’s not really safe for a girl your age to be out at this time of night.”

Laura cringes. “Dad. She’s not your daughter.”

He puts his hands up in surrender. “Sorry, sorry. You’re right. Just be safe.”

“Will do.” She nods and he steps into the cruiser, leaving them alone.

Laura leans against the door, her hands pressing into the metal behind her back. “So... that’s my Dad.”

Within seconds, Carmilla is back to her usual self. “He seems kind of protective. Explains a lot.”

Laura rolls her eyes. “Yeah.” She stands up straight, hesitates and shakes her head in disbelief. “Uh, so, you’re actually... really good with kids.”

Carmilla shrugs. “You mentioned that already.”

“I know, I just. I saw what you were doing with the food and-”

She shrugs and puts her hand in the back pockets of her ripped skinny jeans. “Yeah well, the kid was hungry, so.”

Laura smiles. “Be careful, you’re crossing over into dangerous territory.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, I’m starting to suspect you might actually be a good person.”

“I was just taking advantage of free food.”

“Sure you were.” She thinks for a second and cringes. “Anyway, I’m sorry. Again. For judging you before. I’m glad we’re... friends now. I guess?” Laura tries to pride herself on being a fantastic conversationalist. This is not one of her shining moments.

“Friends.” Carmilla nods and runs a hand through her hair. Laura feels a brief flash of jealousy because her hair really is gorgeous. “On one condition.”

“Is it the One Direction thing?”

She smiles. “Alright, two conditions. First, the One Direction thing. Second, you stop apologizing. I forgave you the first time, princess.”

“Oh. But you didn’t say anything.”

“Contrary to popular belief, not everyone says every thought that goes through their mind.”

Laura slouches with a pout. “Well, you could have said something. I thought you were angry at me.”

“I know.”
“You’re very strange, you know that?”

“You’re a little weird yourself.”

Laura nods. “Fair point. See you Monday?”

“Not if I see you first.” Carmilla looks her up and down, winks, and walks away, her eyes craning up to look at the sky. The sun is starting to set and Laura sees no trace of the girl who held Skyler's hand and made a french fry moustache just minutes before.

(Yep. Definitely a shapeshifter.)

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Kirsch bounds down the stairs two at a time to an empty living room, nearly landing on Selina, who bolts from her throne on the bottom step and burrows herself between the couch cushions.

He winces. “Sorry, little buddy.” Her ears go all the way back and he can’t blame her. Six feet of clumsy teenage boy is a lot to come at you when you’re a twelve pound cat.

He ducks through the doorway of the kitchen, spotting a green post-it note stuck to the refrigerator door.

*Working late again. Love you. -Mom*

*(Call your sister!!)*

He rolls his eyes and promises to call Sarah later. It’s a friday night, and as much as his Mom might like to pretend it’s not true, there’s no way she’s studying in her dorm. It isn’t in her DNA.

Kirsch opens the fridge and scans the shelves. There’s leftover chicken parmesan from Wednesday night, and a much more appetizing looking box of pizza that Sam dropped off after practice yesterday. He frowns when he opens it, there’s only three slices left. With a shrug he grabs it and tries to juggle a pitcher of sweet tea and a cup sitting on the counter in his other hand.

He drops the cup.

It makes a racket as it bounces off the hardwood flooring and Kirsch gives it a few helpful kicks to steer it towards the couch where he drops next to a still traumatized Selina. She slumps to the floor and begins inspecting the cup until he sets it on the table.

“Nuh uh, that’s mine.”

Selina swats at his leg, stops to consider something for a moment, and promptly falls asleep on his foot.

He flips on the television and grabs a game controller and a slice of pizza.

Five minutes later he shifts in his seat, sinking into the cushions and trying not to move his cat pillow of a foot. Selina is already purring.

Kirsch smiles wickedly and taunts into his headset. “Hope you’re ready to get your ass kicked, little freshman.”

From the other line he hears, “As if. You’ve got nothin’ on me, fag.”
“Bro. Not cool. Zetas don’t use that word.”

Another voice chimes in through the headset. “Dude, what the fuck? One of our own bros is gay.”

“Whatever.”

Kirsch’s eyes bulge and he stops paying attention to the game. “Uh, dude, not ‘whatever’. My sister’s gay.”

Another voice chimes in, “Mine is too.”

“Dude, we should set them up.”

“Nah, she doesn’t date.”

“Oh, that’s cool.”

Selina decides in this moment to protest the noise level and hops in his lap, putting a single paw on his game controller. *Stop everything you are doing and pay attention to only me.*

“Dudes, I gotta go, something just came up.” He’s already flinging his headset off and setting the pizza box on the coffee table. “Hey buddy, wanna snuggle?”

She meows and sets her paws on his chest, halfway between curling up in his lap and perching on his shoulder.

“Gotta make up your mind soon before Daddy has to go make dinner for his Mommy. You know the drill buddy, it’s almost nine o’clock.”

This must make some sort of sense to her because she lays across his lap and starts to purr again when he scratches behind her ear.

“There we go.”

-----

**Summer Psycho (8:32) : I’m going to kill you.**

**Kirsch (8:33) : wat??**

**Summer Psycho (8:33) : Check your email, dumbass.**

**Kirsch (8:42): oops**

Danny throws her phone down on the bed beside her and sinks lower into her pillows. Detention. Saturday detention. *Seven hours* in a library with Kirsch.

No, this was great. Truly. Nothing could *possibly* bring her more joy.

Danny had skimmed the e-mail from Mr. Beckett ten minutes ago, reading past several sentences about how her behavior in her position of authority was “extremely immature” and “could possibly affect any chance at future scholarships if changes aren’t made” and landed on the outline of her punishment: detention. She and Kirsch were both expected in the library in less than twelve hours, and despite her brief lapse in judgement earlier, she had decided this was entirely his fault.

She eyes the laptop on the edge of her bed and shuts it, putting the e-mail out of her mind. The one
word text message stares up at her from the screen of her phone. Her eyes roll of their own accord because really, it’s kind of spectacular how he can piss her off with four letters. It’s the irritation that reminds her why she doesn’t ever bother talking to him.

She picks up her phone again.

**Summer Psycho (8:44)**: *Thanks to you I’m missing practice tomorrow, asshole.*

**Kirsch (8:44)**: *sry*

Danny picks up her book, a pretentious and overrated philosophical piece, thanks to Carmilla’s suggestion. It’s obvious that Mrs. Hall has a soft spot for her, although Danny can’t even begin to understand why.

She’s condescending and borderline disruptive. She broods, taking up two desks in the back of the classroom. (One for her, one to put her feet up on.) She somehow manages to wax philosophical at least four times a day about books they won’t read for another four weeks, and she’s tardy. Almost always tardy. Definitely not teacher’s pet material, and definitely not a good enough student to justify having to read Goethe at 9pm on a Friday. Danny tosses the book back on the bed and picks up her phone.

**Kirsch (8:49)**: *did u need 2 go 2 practice?*

**Summer Psycho (8:50)**: *No, you know what? I actually prefer to show up to my track meets completely unprepared. It’s a routine I developed last year, we like to call it the football team approach.*

**Kirsch (8:51)**: *rude*

**Summer Psycho (8:51)**: *You kind of had that one coming, fumbles.*

**Kirsch (8:53)**: *shut up*

**Summer Psycho (8:54)**: *Gladly.*

She closes the book, not even bothering to mark her page.

(She’s been on the same one all week.)

Her phone vibrates and Danny takes a deep breath, trying to remind herself why she even gave him her phone number. She shoves it into her back pocket and stands up, stepping out of her room. He had told her to shut up. He could wait a few minutes.

The door shuts behind her and she pads down the stairs. Her parents are home and she can hear the sounds of an occupied living room. A punchline is delivered as she slips into the kitchen and rifles through the refrigerator, followed by a laugh track. There’s nothing to eat or drink but she lingers in the kitchen for another moment.

She checks her phone. Scoffs.

**Kirsch (8:56)**: *if ur so good y do u need 2 practice?*

**Summer Psycho (8:56)**: *I don’t need to practice, I need to train.*

That wasn’t mean enough.
Summer Psycho (8:56) : *Dumbass.*

Better.

**Kirsch (8:57) :** do u want me 2 train w/ u?

**Summer Psycho (8:57) :** What?

She leans against the counter, waiting for a response pop up on the screen of her phone.

**Kirsch (8:58) :** i hav keys 2 the football field

**Summer Psycho (8:58) :** And?

**Kirsch (8:58) :** the football field has a track

**Summer Psycho (8:58) :** I'm aware.

**Kirsch (9:00) :** meet me @ the track in 10

**Summer Psycho (9:02) :** Why the hell would I do that?

**Kirsch (9:02) :** ill run laps w/ u

**Summer Psycho (9:02) :** No thanks.

**Kirsch (9:03) :** watever. im still gonna b there

**Summer Psycho (9:03) :** Congratulations.

**Kirsch (9:05) :** ;;

“Who are you texting?” She looks up to see her mother, coffee cup in hand. She’s smiling. In Danny’s seventeen years of experience, that isn’t usually a good sign. “Is it a boy?”

“No.” Danny shakes her head, pockets her phone. “It’s um, it’s Laura. She just wanted to know if I needed a ride tomorrow.”

Her face falls and Danny is glad she’s given up caring what they think of her relationships. “A ride to what?”

“There’s a...” She waves her hand before running it through her hair. “School thing. I’ll just walk, though.”

“Alright.” She sips at her coffee and Danny makes a split second decision.

“I think I’m gonna go for a run.”

-----

Carmilla’s bag bounces as she drops herself on the bed next to it, settling into her pillows and readjusting. Something sharp pokes into her back and she pulls it out with a scowl. A pen. She tosses it across the room and huffs as it bounces off a pile of books, rolling underneath her desk.

She hears Will’s poor attempts at trash talking through the walls - he has his headset on and is
probably kneeling on the edge of his bed, throwing weak insults at one of his Zeta Club friends.

Like any fourteen year old boy, he takes Halo 3 very seriously.

you’re not the only one

refusing to go down

you’re not the only one

so get up

let’s start a riot-

Her phone starts to vibrate seconds after her ringtone plays and her thoughts stop in their tracks. She does a mental check on the time, denying her suspicions. It’s too early for her Mom to come home, and phone calls are rare when your Mother doesn’t have the time of day to send a text longer than five words.

She pulls her phone from her bag, rolling her eyes at the caller ID.

Tiny Persistence.

She unlocks it and lays back. “Please don’t tell me you’re calling to ask what color I want my friendship bracelet in.”

Laura laughs on the other line, a nervous chuckle. “Y’know most people say hello when they pick up the phone.”

“Most people don’t call each other twenty minutes after spending half the day together.”

“Ha. Right.” There’s a pause and Carmilla almost makes another sarcastic comment about how she knew Laura was on the other line because of her need to double check the definition of clingy, not because she had saved her number. She loses her window when Laura speaks again. “I was actually just calling to ask if you got an e-mail.”

“That’s a bit vague, cupcake. I’m a popular girl, I get a lot of e-mails.”

“Mr. Beckett sent me an e-mail, apparently Skyler’s parents chewed out the woman who runs the daycare and she called Mr. Beckett and he sent me this long e-mail about disappointment and irresponsibility and called my Dad, at which point I was pretty sure we were gonna get expelled but my Dad talked him down and Mr. Beckett sent me another-e-mail about how I have detention and I guess I’m kind of rambling, huh?”

She double checks the time. It’s almost 9:30. “Well, that sounds like a blast. Is there any particular reason you called?” She considers adding a comment about wanting to hear her sultry voice but avoids it. Laura’s inevitable assertion of her heterosexuality is one Carmilla would rather delay. She’s cute. And definitely fun to flirt with, but undeniably straight. Her walls are covered in pictures of boys and her taste in music is... disheartening.

But life is infinitely more interesting when such things are left to the imagination.

“I was just... wondering if you got the same e-mail.”

“I’m sure I did.”
“They didn’t like, give you a freebie or something? I mean, you are the principal’s daughter, so...”

“I don’t get freebies, sweetheart. If I did I wouldn’t have gone to that stupid daycare in the first place.”

“Oh. Okay. Uh, I guess I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

“Not if I see you first.”

Laura makes a small sound - something between a squeak and a giggle, and Carmilla takes it as a goodbye.

She hangs up with a shake of her head and a smile on her face. The phone call closes out, leaving her staring at Laura’s contact information. She chews on her lip and rolls her eyes, typing out the name “Laura” in the place of “Tiny Persistence.”

She could think up another nickname later.

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Danny pulls a headphone from her ear, kicking up her longboard before she can skate into the grassy patch that borders the football field.

The phrase ‘what the fuck am i doing’ plays over in her head for the eighteenth time that night as she puts her board in the ticket booth. It’s a small shack with two seats and a window, sporting faded red paint and a pathetic attempt at a price menu from the three weeks out of the year that it’s used as a hot dog stand. That particular summer society fundraiser is the only reason Danny knows there’s far too many spiders in the corner beneath the counter for her to worry about anyone trying to steal her things. She kicks it out of sight and pulls her hair into a ponytail as she walks towards the track.

She’s glad that she’s alone when the stadium lights flip on all of a sudden, catching her off guard and causing her to misplace a step. Danny half-stumbles, catching herself before she can trip into the grass. A quick surveillance of the area confirms her hopes: she’s still alone.

A shadow starts hopping down from the top of the bleachers where she assumes the light controls are at and Danny eyes the fence in front of her, deciding to hop it.

He might have the keys but that doesn’t mean she needs them.

It shakes a little as she climbs over it because, alright on second thought maybe wire structures weren’t exactly made to support more than six feet of athlete.

(Hindsight’s 20/20 and at this point all she cares about is hopping this fence before Kirsch reaches the bottom of the bleachers.)

She manages it just in time, clapping the rust from the wires off her hands as he hops down from the staircase and holds up a pair of keys. “Bro. I told you I had keys.”

She shrugs. “I got tired of waiting.”

He unlocks the fence and joins her on the track. “Nice shorts.”

Her eyes narrow. “Don’t objectify me.” She snaps back at him, forgetting for a moment that the only pair of running shorts she had left were her Spiderman shorts.

“Dude. You have a comic book character on your ass. Relax.”
She stares him down, searching for something to pick on but comes up empty. He’s wearing what she can only describe as jock gear, a sleeveless muscle tank and a pair of basketball shorts. His shoes are a hideous yellow, but like any teenage boy, he owns at least ten pairs of ridiculously overpriced tennis shoes, each of which she’s already thoroughly mocked. She needs new material.

Maybe if she’s lucky he’ll trip while they’re running.

“And by the way, he’s a totally uncool superhero. If you’re gonna go with Marvel, at least get like, Hulk shorts.”

“What do you mean ‘if I’m gonna go with Marvel’?”

He drops to his chest on the ground and starts pumping out push-ups. “Marvel sucks, duh.”

Danny puts her hands on her hips. “Let me guess. Your favorite superhero is Superman.”

“Totally. The dude’s a classic.”

“He’s overrated.”

“And Spiderman isn’t?”

“Spiderman is.” She looks up, shaking her head. “You know what, I’m not doing this. I came here to train.”

He doesn’t respond but continues doing push-ups. He’s easily going on his 50th by the time Danny gives up waiting and starts running her first lap.

Somewhere between her first and second lap, Kirsch relocates. He’s past the end zone, working at the pull up bars now. She ignores him, mentally planning three weeks worth of Summer Society meetings before he finally falls into step next to her.

“Nice brisk pace you got there, Psycho Society.”

“Having trouble keeping up, Superman?”

“No. I meant brisk as in a brisk walk. Obviously. I’m pretty sure this is how fast I walk to my mailbox.” He rolls his eyes and she suddenly remembers being a kid, thinking movie scenes where characters suddenly fantasize about hitting other characters with frying pans were overdramatic.

She was wrong. They’re real and tempting. She isn’t sure of the logistics of hitting someone with a frying pan when you’re actively running and very much lacking a frying pan, but she’s a creative girl. She could definitely make it work.

“Big talk coming from a guy who skipped out on the first half mile.”

“Hey. I wasn’t just warming a bench back there. Upper body strength is like, super important.”

“If you think you’re so fast, why don’t you try to outrun me?”

He runs a few steps ahead of her and turns around. Running backwards. Running backwards and taunting her. “Maybe I like the company. Running’s boring.”

She narrows her eyes and wonders if it would be worth it to trip him. He might cry, but he also might take her down with him. She decides against it.
“Can’t do it, can you?”

“What? Outrun you? I so can.”

“Can’t.”

“Uh, can.”

“You can’t.”

“Bro. I totally can. Do you think you can outrun me?”

She scoffs. “Of course I can outrun you.”

“Why don’t you prove it?”

“Because maybe I don’t have an ego the size of Texas. Or maybe I don’t need to prove that I can run faster than a lousy football player who’s never run farther than fifteen yards in a single play.”

He scowls. “Low blow, Summer Psycho. Not cool. It’s on.”

Danny laughs as Kirsch takes off at a dead run, taking a second to watch him. He’s actually pretty fast, and it’s the only thing that convinces her to set off after him. He’s strong and has a decent amount of muscle, but endurance was never his strong suit. She remembers this from countless field days and in-school competitions. Kirsch might be the only person who hasn’t lost a tug-of-war game since 2010, but there’s a reason Danny is the anchor in every relay.

She catches up to him easily and it’s his arrogance that costs him his lead. He turns around to smile mockingly at the distance between them and stumbles - taking several exaggerated steps in order to stay upright as he almost trips over a discarded traffic cone.

Clearly, God is not on her side. After the week she’s had, she truly deserved to see him fall face first. She decides this is a nice compromise, though, because he reels while trying to get his balance and she easily passes him.

“I’m sorry, what were you saying about outrunning me?” Danny puts her hand to her ear and turns around to mock him face to face.

And he’s gone.

“Kirsch, what the-”

The track is empty and she hears a rattling as he vaults over the fence, keys forgotten in the lock.

She jogs over to him and shouts, “What the fuck?”

Kirsch turns around and his eyes plead with her. “Dude, shut up!” He almost growls at her confused expression before gesturing wildly towards the other end of the field where someone is unlocking the fence from the visitor’s side.

“Fuck.” She takes off, grabbing the keys from the door on her way out.

(Shes definitely not trying to hop that fence again.)

She joins him underneath the bleachers. “You forgot your keys, dumbass.”
They crouch together underneath the seats. “Thanks bro.”

“I have a name, you know.”

He ignores her. “Can you see who it is?”

“No. Why the hell is somebody on the football field at this time of night?”

“I don’t know. But we gotta jet, I can’t get another detention.”

She grabs him by the front of his shirt and drags him back under the bleachers before he can run away. “Don’t you dare, my board’s in the ticket shack.”

“So?”

“So, I’m not getting caught here alone. This was your idea. You’re the one who dragged me here.”

“Hey, I didn’t drag you anywhere, okay?” He stands a little taller, barely avoiding the the bleachers over his head. “You came all by yourself.”

“Ten bucks that’s not the first time you said that to a girl.”

“Shut up.”

Danny balls her fists between them and adds this moment to her mental count of how many times she’s wanted to be in possession of a frying pan in the past half hour. “If I get another detention for this, you’re going home without a left arm.”

“Dude. That’s my throwing arm.”

“God, are you even-” Her hands go to his shoulders and her expression turns dead serious. “Kirsch. Go get my board before I actually commit murder.”

“Why do I have to get your board?”

“So that I don’t kill you with a variety of blunt objects.”

He pushes her hands away. “Not happening.”

“Go get my board.”

“No.”

“Kirsch, just get my fucking skateboard.”

 Uh, no.”

She eyes the distance between them and the shack. It’s at least fifty feet away and she would definitely get caught.

“If you don’t go get my board some time in the next twenty seconds, I will literally never call you anything other than Brody.”

He narrows his eyes and locks his jaw. “You wouldn’t.”

“Oh, I would.”
They stare each other down for a moment, waiting for one of them to blink. Kirsch finally grumbles and ducks out from underneath the bleachers, making a beeline for the shack.

She counts to ten, waiting for it.

She’s at twelve when she hears the shrill scream and smiles.

“Dude!” He runs out of the booth holding the longboard at arm’s length. “There’s like... spiders, oh my God.” He notices one on his foot and God is finally good to her, giving her the beautiful opportunity to laugh as he tumbles to the ground, feet kicking the whole time. “Dude, what the FUCK.”

Danny hears a shout coming from the football field and the man - a teacher, is running at them. Kirsch scrambles to his feet and they take off for the parking lot together. The fence separating the lot from the field is significantly shorter, barely a hurdle. Kirsch stumbles over it as she drops her board and kicks off on it.

“Later, asshole. He can’t catch us both on foot.”

He recovers quickly, running next to her as she skates. “Good point. I don’t have to outrun him, I just have to outrun you.”

“I’m pretty sure we just proved you can’t do that.”

“You might be fast, Psycho Society, but there’s no way in hell you’re gonna outrun a truck.” He comes to a stop and her foot hits the ground, her board skidding to a halt.

“What?”

“Gotta jet.” He points to a truck parked in the back of the lot and takes off. Danny looks between the truck and the road. The teacher, who she recognizes as Mr. Beckett, is running up the path towards the parking lot.

“Screw it.” She picks up her board and runs after him.

He nearly leaps into the car, not noticing Danny climb into the bed of the truck until he turns around to back out. “Dude, what the fuck?”

“Go!”

He stares blankly at her through the back window and she rolls her eyes. “I know you have difficulty grasping most mundane tasks, but this one’s not that hard. Right foot down, car goes faster.”

“I know that.” He barks back before hitting the gas at a more than alarming speed. Danny braces herself against the side of the truck as they take off, Mr. Beckett shouting after them. Kirsch swerves to avoid a speed bump and they almost drive completely off the road.

“You good back there?” He shouts over the radio that blared to life somewhere between almost turning their health teacher into roadkill and nearly taking out a mailbox.

“I will be if you get me home without killing me.”

He laughs at that and she allows herself this one moment to enjoy herself. Maybe it’s the adrenaline, or maybe she’s reliving Kirsch’s encounter with the ticket booth spiders, but she starts to laugh too.

(When he drops her off at home, she insults him four more times and they agree to never speak of it
At some point around 11pm, Will leaves the house. Carmilla gets up to grab a soda, almost considers swiping a wine cooler from the garage, and takes note of the empty space in the hallway where he usually keeps his bicycle.

At least he isn’t on foot. If it starts to rain, she’s sure he’ll call her.

She wanders around the house for a few minutes, strumming her fingers against the marble countertops in the kitchen and then picking up a book in the living room. She lays down on the couch and adjusts, rolling over onto her stomach. She cycles from sitting on the chair to the couch to the floor for about ten minutes.

She needs a more interesting book.

Carmilla flings her legs off of their perch on the couch’s armrest and stands in a single fluid motion as her eyes start to skim one of their towering bookcases. Milton, Murdoch, Jean-Paul Sartre, Voltaire. She’s read these so many times you would expect they would bore her. But if she’s being completely honest, she doesn’t fully understand them yet, hasn’t had enough life experience to. She’s about to choose between two pieces from her collection of 19th century literature (it’s that kind of night) when the sound of a car door being shut echoes from outside the house.

She slides the books back into their home on their respective shelves and turns on her heel. Taking the stairs quietly, she makes her way into her room and shuts the door behind her.

Carmilla locks it and then, on second thought, unlocks it. She leaves the light off and cracks open the window over her bed. The house is still silent when she pulls a pair of headphones off her desk and puts them in her ears, shimmies out the window, and shuts it behind her. Her feet find their familiar steps on the tile of the roof and she hops from the edge to the nearby tree branch, scaling the distance from her window to the roof of the house.

There’s a bird perched on her spot on the roof and she ushers him over a few feet. “Sorry, kid. Reserved seating.” He cocks his head to the side while she slides across the rooftop and pulls her knees up to her chest. The side of her mouth quirks up at way the bird stares her down. “Fine. You can stay.”

He flies away a few minutes later while she sits, drowning out the sound of her neighborhood with music that’s almost too loud. She thinks about milkshakes and Mount Rushmore.

Carmilla manages a smile.

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags #hsau updates for chapter updates and #carmilla hsau for general updates on the AU.
Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 3, or the one with Saturday detention and an almost crime scene.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So is this what I have to look forward to from you this school year?"

Laura rolls her eyes as her dad pulls up to the front of the school, "It's only one detention, dad. And an unfair one, I might add."

He puts the car in park and looks at her with raised eyebrows, "You easily forget that I was there that day and saw the state of the classroom."

"I wasn't a part of that!"

"Ah, yes. You were just involved in the missing child part. Forgive your old man, he's losing his memory in his old age."

She bites the inside of her cheek but fails to keep the grin off her face, "I'm leaving now. Don't make me not talk to you and end up walking home later."

"Getting to stay home and not pick you up - what a punishment."

She lightly shoves him and is out of the car a second later. She's almost at the front doors of the school when she hears the car horn. She turns to look back and sees her dad has rolled the passenger window down, "Three o'clock?"

She smiles and scrunches her face, considering it before nodding, "Three o'clock."

She watches him nod and give a dorky salute as he drives off. She turns and braces herself to open the heavy metal doors. Maybe if they're locked she doesn't have to go through this long torture. (A girl can dream.)

She blows out a sigh as the doors come open without any trouble. Well, maybe not no trouble - they are heavy and she is all pep with zero muscle. There’s a calming eeriness to walking the deserted halls. She starts to see things that go unnoticed when the halls are bustling with people and activity. Like the clock outside of the weight room being stuck on 10:42 am. Or the faded posters from last year's end-of-year musical still plastered over the drama board. Or - Carmilla?

Near the end of the hall outside of the library she sees Carmilla sitting on the ground against the lockers, a book open in her hand.

“Hey!” She’s met with silence and goes to frown but notices that Carmilla has her earphones in. She lets out a sigh of relief and speeds up a bit, waving her hand in Carmilla’s peripheral to grab her attention.
Laura laughs and opens the door, the booming sound of yelling immediately hitting her ears.

"I'm just saying, DC characters are too god-like; there's nowhere for their stories to go."

"Bro, are we even reading the same comics?"

Danny scoffs, "Bro, are you able to read at all? I'm surprised you got past a grade 6 reading level."

"Dude."

"So, hi," Laura takes a seat across from Danny and pulls out the chair next to her, but Carmilla walks right past it towards the other end of the table. Laura quickly shoves her bag on the empty chair and looks up to see Danny trying not to smile.

"Morning," Danny turns back to Kirsch, "And don't even think about bringing up Wonder Woman because I'm aware."

"Shit," Carmilla takes a seat and throws her book down with a huff, "Please don't tell me I'm going to have to listen to this fucking nerd fest all day."

Danny smiles sickly sweet, "You're free to leave and go brood somewhere else if you'd like, 'cause I'm not leaving nor am I censoring myself for anyone - the least of all being you."

Carmilla opens her book, "Fantastic. Nothing could make this day better."

"Good morning!"
They all direct their attention towards the door and watch as Perry walks towards the table with LaFontaine in toe, a box of donuts in their hand.

Perry pulls out two chairs at the end of the table and sits down, smiling to the group as LaFontaine drops the box in the middle of the table, “Sorry we’re late - LaFontaine insisted on grabbing donuts before we got here.”

Carmilla slouches in her seat, “I spoke too soon.”

Kirsch pulls out a pack of pop from his bag and cracks one open, some of the fizz possibly hitting Danny in the face if the over-exaggerated wipe of her cheek is any indication. He downs half the can in one gulp, "What are you two doing here?"

"Apparently our decision to remain neutral was seen as condoning your barbaric actions the other day,” Perry turns to Danny, “I expected better from you.”

“Not my proudest moment, I’ll admit,” Danny sighs, “I just want this day over with so I can maybe fit in some training tonight.”

“Are you kidding? This is so cool: a whole day unsupervised in the library.” LaFontaine looks to them and grins, “Do you think the photocopiers still work on the off-hours? I really want to check out a few editions that the asshole in senior Bio always checks out during the week.”

“Oh,” Laura looks around but is only answered with a few shrugs, “I’m sure you can figure it out.”

LaFontaine’s grin widens, “This is going to be awesome.”

(She doesn’t necessarily agree, but she appreciates the optimism.)

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"How long has it been now?"

"Sweetie, it's been 37 minutes,” Perry sighs, “Not much different from when you asked at the 34 minute mark.”

LaFontaine groans, “How was I supposed to know Mr. Jenson was going to ban us from doing anything fun? I’m going to lose my mind sitting here doing nothing all day.”

“Well...it is detention.”

Laura tries to hide her smile at LaFontaine’s look of disgust. She surveys the room and at each new face it gets harder and harder to keep her smile at bay. Perry is looking on at LaFontaine in exhaustion. Kirsch is arranging his five empty pop cans into some sort of teetering structure while Danny looks like she’s trying to break the world record for most eye rolls in a ten-minute time span.

But the most amusing of them all is Carmilla who is - surprise, surprise - still reading her book at the farthest end of the table. She opened it about seven seconds upon entering the library and still hasn’t bothered to take off her sunglasses. She's doing everything to make it clear that she isn't listening to them bicker but Laura knows that isn't true.

"If you're so bored here why don't you hit the road?"

(See? Case and point.)

Perry scoffs, "You can't just leave detention. Why even bother showing up?"
"I thought it would be a quiet place to read but I should have known that chance was shot around
you idiots."

LaFontaine shoots up in their seat, "Don't speak to her that way."

Carmilla closes her book and pushes her sunglasses to the top of her head. There are bags under her
eyes but she still manages to look more runway ready than Laura ever would be. She holds her
breath as Carmilla folds her hands on the table and leans forward, grinning, "And what are you
going to do if I don't?"

(It would almost be too simple if her old friends and her somewhat-new-still-in-a-probation-period
friend got along without a problem.)

"Okay!" Laura claps her hands, "Why don't we play a game to pass the time?"

Kirsch's eyes light up as he snaps up his head, "Now you're talking, little hottie."

Carmilla lets out a scoff and scrunches her nose in disgust. Laura leans forward and smiles back at
Kirsch, "Do you have an idea?"

He picks up a can, resulting in the pile tumbling all over the table. The rest of the group lets out a
 collective sigh, "Oops," he manages a grin, "But, yeah, we should totally play spin the bottle."

“You are such an annoying frat boy,” Danny rolls her eyes and leans back in her seat, “How
convenient of you to suggest spin the bottle as the only boy in a group that has a lot of girls.”

“Hey! You're into chicks, too. I’m like, doing you a solid.”

“Doing me a solid?” Danny sits up straight, “Doing me a solid?”

Oh no. This is it. This is the moment Danny finally loses all of her cool and buries Kirsch six feet
underground. She’s talked with her dad one too many times about the average sentence for
manslaughter for Laura to know a potentially dangerous situation when it’s presenting itself in front
of her.

“Let’s just play, okay?”

The group turns to her and she suddenly feels heat creep up her neck. LaFontaine and Perry are
doing their best at keeping poker faces about the whole thing. Kirsch smiles at her gratefully while
Danny still looks like she’s trying to remember every episode of Law and Order: SVU she’s ever
watched for tips on how to dispose of a body.

But then there’s Carmilla. She has forgotten about her book completely and is staring at Laura with
the oddest expression. She feels this pull, this sudden need to understand what questions are swirling
around those eyes.

(Carmilla is like a puzzle and Laura constantly feels like she’s always missing the most important
piece.)

Before she loses her nerve, she picks up the can and spins it in the middle of the table. She lands on
LaFontaine and they both laugh at each other before giving the briefest peck on the lips.

Perry smiles so wide that Laura is scared the expression is going to remain fixed if she doesn’t move
it soon. She makes a note to buy her a new iTunes gift card as an apology when she gets home later.
The remainder of the game is surprisingly uninteresting aside from two incidents at the beginning and the end of the game.

After a few turns (LaFontaine kisses Perry with the straightest face they could manage; Perry kisses Kirsch with thinly veiled discomfort), Kirsch lands on Laura.

He grins, “Just like old times.”

Laura laughs nervously, “Seventh grade was a long time ago, Kirsch.”

Carmilla finally puts her book down since the start of the game, “Would you care to share with the class?”

There’s the shapeshifter again. Laura feels dizzy from how effortlessly Carmilla moves in between apathy and rapt attention. She looks at Laura expectantly, but she can’t help but notice something about the shade of her eyes, like they’re simultaneously trying to hide and reveal something.

Carmilla is still staring at her and she nervously tucks a piece of hair behind her ear, “Kirsch was my first kiss back in the seventh grade.”

“How very unfortunate for you, creampuff.”

Kirsch sits up and puffs out his chest, “It was a pretty epic kiss, you know.”

Perry mumbles doubtful and LaFontaine has a slight cough attack from the sudden laugh that bursts from their mouth. Danny sits back with a smug grin on her face as Kirsch scowls at them, “It was!” He turns back to Carmilla, “It was so amazing she hasn’t kissed anyone since.”

“Kirsch!” Laura’s cheeks warm and she adjusts herself in her seat a few times, for some reason finding it physically impossible for her to look up and meet Carmilla’s eyes. She can feel them on her - the stare is magnetic - but she refuses. She instead chooses to glare at Kirsch, “That was unnecessary.”

She gives Kirsch a quick kiss and reaches forward to grab the can but is stilled with Carmilla’s hand over her own. She looks up and Carmilla is trying not to smile, “Is it true?”

Laura rolls her eyes, “It’s not a big deal—”

“She also had a huge crush on me.”

“Kirsch.”

(In an unexpected twist, Laura may be the one to beat Danny to putting Kirsch six feet under ground before the day is done.)

Carmilla slowly removes her hand and leans back in her seat, eyes never leaving Laura’s. She licks her lips, “As I said before,” her voice drops, “How very unfortunate.”

Laura chooses this opportunity to spin the can and pretend the last five minutes of her life never happened.

Much to Laura’s relief, the proceeding kisses are fairly tame and drama-free until Danny ends up landing on Kirsch.

“Nope. This isn’t happening.”
Perry sighs, “If I had to kiss Kirsch, then so do you.”

“Ladies, I’m feeling a bit attacked here.”

“Good,” Danny glares at him, “Because you’re about to feel an actual attack if you don’t shut up.”

Kirsch holds his hands up in surrender, “Hey, if you’re too chicken to-”

Danny’s slap echoes throughout the nearly empty library before she leans forward to go in for the kiss.

Despite it being the shortest peck Laura has ever witnessed, Danny still wipes at her mouth a few times. Kirsch is scowling at her and rubbing at his cheek as she sits back down, crossing her arms, “God, you taste like stale donuts.”

"Hey, it's not my fault none of you wanted to eat any of them."

She groans, "Fuck this, I’m not playing this stupid game anymore."

Carmilla snatches the can, “We’ve only been playing for twenty minutes. You’re all so weak.”

“That’s interesting, Madam Misery still wants to play,” Danny raises her eyebrow, “Are you hoping to land on a special someone?”

Carmilla scoffs and crosses her arms, “Oh sure, I’m just waiting to land on the idiot puppy so I can watch you get jealous and completely lose your shit.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Danny looks like she’s going to gag, “That’s appalling.”

“Dudes, I’m right here.”

An echo of shut the fuck up, Kirsch leave both girls’ mouths. They look to each other in shock and then immediate disgust.

Laura throws her head in her hands and pulls them slowly down her face, “Okay. So maybe this wasn’t the best idea. Why don’t we try something else?”

“Hmm,” Kirsch shrugs, “We could try FMK.”

Laura scrunches her nose, “What’s that?”

“Fuck, Marry or Kill, sweetheart,” Carmilla leans forward, “We give you three people and then you decide.”

LaFontaine looks around and frowns, their eyes landing on Perry, "Maybe we should play something else."

Perry turns to them, “Why can’t we just play this? There’s nothing else for us to do.”

“I don’t know,” their eyes shift around, “Maybe not everyone is comfortable with it.”

“Well, is anyone against playing?” Her eyes scan the room and finally land back on Lafontaine, raising an eyebrow before turning back to the group, “That settles things, so I’ll start. Carmilla,” Carmilla rolls her eyes, mumbling here we go under her breath, “Fuck, marry, kill: Laura, Kirsch and Danny.”
Laura whips her head towards Carmilla, “Really?” She shakes her head. "Wait, which one did you mean for each choice?"

"I said them in order. That's how you play the game," Carmilla looks her up and down with a smirk, “Sorry to disappoint.”

“No, not at all,” Laura feels all eyes on her, “I mean, I guess I should feel honoured that you chose marriage over...sex.”

Carmilla leans back and raises an eyebrow, “And what kind of marriage doesn’t involve having sex?”

Before Laura can even process what that means Danny interrupts them, "Hold on, I thought you were gay?"

Laura makes a face because - okay, not exactly what she expected Danny to say. It’s not like Carmilla is gay. Nothing about her screams gay - not that stereotypes are indicators of a sexual orientation. But they are helpful clues. Like glowing landmarks on a map. Not that Laura was looking for them. And besides, Carmilla doesn’t even go to any of their GSA meetings, so-

“I am. But I’d rather have sex with the puppy then have to even contemplate what it would be like to see you naked.”

“You are gay?”

Danny holds her hand up, “Are we going to ignore the fact that she’s being a huge bitch right now or is it just me?”

Kirsch smiles, “You would actually tap this?” He looks down at himself and nods, “Nice.”

“Please shut up, Kirsch,” the whole table looks towards Laura and her eyes widen, but she turns back to Carmilla, “I never knew you were gay.”

Carmilla retreats to herself, sitting back and picking at her book, rolling her eyes briefly, “Didn’t know someone so proud to be in the GSA would be such an asshole about my sexuality.”

Perry leans forward and hisses out, “The whole point of a GSA is to keep it a secret, Laura.”

Her eyes flicker to Kirsch and he shrugs, “What? I know about it, too. Jake is a really good bro of mine and told me all about it.”

Laura ignores him and the growing panic on Perry’s face in favour of turning her attention back to Carmilla, “I didn’t mean it offensively. It’s just, if you’re gay then why haven’t you come to the GSA meetings? They’re safe spaces so you and other queer youth can join in solidarity.”

Carmilla scoffs, “Maybe because I don’t need a safe space to talk about how much I love fucking girls.”

Danny laughs humourlessly, “God, you are so fucking full of yourself.”

“Please,” Carmilla cocks an eyebrow, “if you have a problem then spit it out.”

Laura looks between the two of them, “Guys, listen-”
“Oh, I have no problem other than the fact that I am sick of listening to your stuck-up bullshit. Why shit all over a club that allows people to come together for support? My parents are just waiting for the day I realize being bi actually means I’m straight with a rebellious phase, and getting to talk about shit like that at GSA is actually helpful.”

Carmilla claps and gives her a patronizing smile, “Would you like an award for sharing?”

“Carmilla,” Laura frowns at her, “There’s no need to be that rude.”

“Don’t worry, Laura, she can afford to be because her mom obviously doesn’t care about her sexuality, so why give a fuck about people who need support?” Danny turns towards Carmilla and Laura can see the clenching of Carmilla’s jaw, “Speaking of, how does it feel to slum it out with the rest of us? You must have fucked up really badly if Mommy Dearest couldn’t care enough to get you out of detention.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Are you guys on the outs now? Does this mean you’re going to have to actually work for your grades? Because some of us are actually putting in an effort to keep up in our classes without having the benefit of nepotism.”

Carmilla lunges forward, “You can go fuck yourself, Society Bitch. Or better yet, why don’t you do us all a favour and remove the stick shoved up your ass so you can finally loosen up? That way you can finally just fuck the puppy dog over here because I know you’re just acheing to.”

They both launch out of their seats and Laura jumps up to stand between them - which is about as helpful as David trying to tame Goliath considering Danny has a whole foot of height on her.

“You fucking-”

“They look towards the back door and can see Mr. Jenson marching towards them. Laura still keeps herself as a physical block between both girls, slightly concerned with how heavy they’re both breathing.

The teacher takes a look at the seething girls on either end of Laura’s arms and shakes his head, “Listen, Mr. Beckett roped me into supervising this detention because I owed him a favour. I didn’t sign up to deal with this kind of behaviour,” he looks at Danny and Carmilla in particular, “You are yelling and acting like children. If you can’t get along around each other then please separate. I won’t say it again and I definitely won’t hesitate to write you all up for another detention. And don’t think you’ll get someone as laid back as me next time - Miss Putowski won’t be as lenient.”

He makes the I’m watching you motion with his hand before turning and walking towards the back doors.

Once he’s gone Danny takes a step forward, pressing into Laura’s still-outstretched hand, “You’re lucky he came in here or else I would’ve-”

Carmilla laughs, “What? Hit me? Go ahead, Red. I think I can handle it if it’s coming from a weak-”

“Enough!”

The group stares at Laura with wide eyes. She looks to them for support but knows that it’s hopeless. LaFontaine and Perry have been actively pretending like this fight isn’t happening and Kirsch is just
watching in awe, probably making bets with himself on who was going to take the first punch.

She sighs and looks to Danny, “Sit.” Carmilla has a smug smile but it’s immediately wiped off of her face when Laura turns to her and says, “You, too.” Carmilla raises her eyebrows and Laura just holds her stare, “Sit.”

Both girls sit on opposite sides of the table and Laura slowly takes her seat. She turns to Carmilla, “What you said was totally uncalled for. If you’re going to be my friend, then you need to treat the people I care about with respect. I’m not saying you have to get along, but I think some civility isn’t a lot to ask.”

“I’m not the one begging for friendship, cupcake.”

“Carmilla-”

Carmilla smiles bitterly and shakes her head, “You know what? Whatever.” She harshly grabs for her book and opens it to a random page, sinking into her seat.

“And you,” Laura turns to Danny and can see the confusion already growing on her face. Out of her peripheral she can see Carmilla sitting up a bit in her chair, but she tries to keep her focus on Danny, “Carmilla doesn’t just get things handed to her. I don’t think it’s very fair of you to attribute all of her hard work to her relationship with her mom. It’s unjust, and honestly? I expected better from you.”

Danny opens her mouth to say something but then closes it, her mouth tensing up. She leans forward, rushing out, “She was totally out of line.”

Laura nods, “I know that and I completely agree.” Danny smiles but it’s short-lived as Laura continues, “But so were you.”

Carmilla has put her book down and is staring at her now, but Laura continues to stare in Danny’s direction, hoping her friend will not be stubborn on this.

There is no response and the silent tension is making Laura’s skin crawl so she folds her hands and nods her head, “So, yeah. We should all just-”

“Uh,” LaFontaine looks around, “I think we’re a little past playing games now, Laura.”

She visibly deflates and picks at her nails. She can feel Carmilla sneaking glances at her but every time she tries to look in that direction the other girl is staring back at the page in front of her.

Perry stands up suddenly, “Alright, well, I’m allergic to elephants in the room so I’m going to take Mr. Jenson’s advice and separate for a bit.”

LaFontaine frowns as they watch Perry walk away. They turn to Laura but she just shrugs.

“Wait – where are you going?”

“Anywhere far away from immature arguments.”

LaFontaine looks back towards the group and smiles apologetically, “Uh, I should go see what’s up with her.”

Kirsch nods, “Good idea. Can you also check if the vending machines are still working on the weekend?”

“Of course they are, numbskull,” Danny sighs, “Why wouldn’t they?”
He shrugs, “Good point.” He turns back to them, “Yo, do you wanna grab me something from them when you go after her?”

LaFontaine makes a face and looks at Perry’s increasingly retreating figure before turning back to Kirsch, “Uh - don’t really have any cash on me, sorry.”

They walk away and Kirsch stands up, “Alright, I’ll make the run myself. Anyone up for it?”

Laura loves Kirsch. She really does. He is the sweetest guy she has ever met - aside from her dad. But it’s times like this - where he honestly believes that the girls silently brooding at this table would actually go anywhere with each other - that she can’t help but wonder what goes on in that head of his.

She smiles at him, “Um, I think we’re good. Thanks for the offer, though.”

Danny suddenly stands, “I think I need a change of environment,” she turns to Kirsch, “Are you buying?”

“Dude, I only have, like, five dollars.”

She nods, “Perfect, that’s enough to get me a chocolate bar.” She gives Laura one last disappointed look before walking towards the door, Kirsch scrambling to keep up with her.

So that just leaves her and Carmilla. Alone. In the library. She would have loved this kind of opportunity to maybe get to know the mystery in front of her but after everything that’s happened, that doesn’t seem likely.

So five minutes pass. And they’re truly the longest five minutes of Laura’s life because Carmilla seems very intent on reading the entirety of that novel before the day is-

“Are you hungry?”

Carmilla picks at the corner of her book, unfolding and refolding a doggy ear of the page she’s on, looking at Laura expectantly. Laura blinks, “Hungry?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “Yes, sweetheart. You know, the feeling you get when you haven’t eaten all day?”

She smiles and lets out a laugh, “I forgot my lunch at home. I can just eat later or something.”

“Well that won’t do.”

Carmilla is up and throwing her book in her bag, slinging it over her shoulder and walking away. Laura stays planted in her seat. Carmilla twirls around and takes a few steps backwards, “You coming?”

The slight smile on her face has a tiny giddiness rising in Laura’s stomach, “Where?”

Carmilla reaches into her pockets and pulls out a pair of keys, “Teachers’ Lounge. Want to go raid the fridges?”

Laura stares at her and can’t fight the grin on her face. She gathers her bag and rushes over, looking over Carmilla’s shoulder in the direction of the room Mr. Jenson is in, “You know I already told my dad this morning that detention wasn’t going to be a regular occurrence for me.”

Carmilla smiles - another rare genuine one, the kind that radiates purity and joy - and shrugs, “Guess
we’ll just have to make sure we don’t get caught, cutie.”

Laura laughs as Carmilla tugs her towards the door, one last look behind her before they venture into the hall.

(Carmilla Karnstein. Confirmed supernatural identity: shapeshifter.)

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“Perry will you slow down, please?”

Perry continues to walk towards the end of the aisle, finally stopping in front of the section she was looking for, “Ah, here it is.”

“Babe,” LaFontaine huffs as they catch up to her and cross their arms while leaning against the bookshelf, “We should go back. Laura is probably having a stroke.”

Perry pulls out a book and starts flipping through the pages, “If we’re going to be stuck here all day I might as well get caught up on my Crim Law homework.”

They watch as Perry aimlessly flips the pages, only staying on a page for a few seconds before turning to the next. They lean closer, “Something’s wrong.”

“Nothing is wrong, LaFontaine.”

Their eyebrows shoot up, “Okay, I know that tone. What’s going on?”

“You know, I can be a normal teenager too sometimes.”

“I... know that,” they put their hand over the book Perry is obviously not reading, “Can you please tell me what’s bothering you?”

She yanks the book back and LaFontaine finally gets a good look at her face. Her jaw is tense and there are worry lines creased around her eyes, “Perry?”

“Just because I’m not into things that everyone else is into doesn’t mean I can’t play along in an innocent hypothetical game.”

LaFontaine steps forward, “Perr, I didn’t mean-”

“You know, I was fine with playing the game until you brought up that ‘some people,’” she makes exaggerated quotations with her fingers, “would be uncomfortable with it. And that is what made me feel uncomfortable.”

“You know, I was fine with playing the game until you brought up that ‘some people,’” she makes exaggerated quotations with her fingers, “would be uncomfortable with it. And that is what made me feel uncomfortable.”

“Perry, listen, I was just trying to protect you from feeling bad.”

“Oh, I see. So now this is something I need to feel bad about?” Perry raises her eyebrows and turns back to stare at the open book in front of her, “Great.”

They wince and double back, that sick feeling rising up in their stomach, “No, I didn’t say that. You’re twisting my words.”

“I’m not a child that needs to be protected and sheltered,” she takes in a deep breath then whirls around on them, “You heard Carmilla: people expect sex in relationships and marriage. It’s weird if you don’t want that - you end up getting treated differently. I know all of this, and I expect that from most people. But out of all the people in the world I never would have expected to be treated
differently by you.”

The words knock the wind out of them. They take a step back and lean against the shelf opposite of Perry. She is staring at them and they try to search through the words circling around their brain for some sort of remedy. Perry sighs and looks away self-consciously, her voice breaking, “I mean, you don’t actually think that stuff, right?”

LaFontaine’s face crumples, “Perr…” They shake their head and step forward, grabbing Perry’s hand and leading her out of the aisle.

“My emotional breakdown is not the time for a library stacks make-out session.”

LaFontaine ignores her and continues to lead them down the aisles, their grip on Perry’s hand tightening with each step. They finally get to the biology section and they drop Perry’s hand, glancing backwards to make sure she doesn’t walk away. She’s staring at them expectantly, so they act quickly. After a few seconds of scanning they find the particular volume in question. It takes two hands to pull it off the shelf - who decided to make these things the weight of a small child? - but LaFontaine is still able to balance it on one arm while they look for the right chapter.

They lick their lips hesitantly before reading out loud, “Oxytocin is one of the chemicals released through physical touch - so, like, cuddling or hugging or kissing-,”

“Yes, yes,” Perry rolls her eyes, “I know the definition of physical touch.”

LaFontaine’s eyes widen - this is collapsing faster than the paper roller coaster that they tried to build for their pre-calc project last week, “Right, right - of course. Um, okay so where was I?” They scan the page, “This in tandem with the release of dopamine causes a feel-good sensation in the brain. This leads the person to spend more time with the object of their affection, creating a never-ending cycle of pleasure that has been compared to addiction,” they risk a look in Perry’s direction, “Is it too cheesy to say that you can’t be mad at me because I’m addicted to you?”

Perry scoffs, “That’s a very distasteful joke.”

LaFontaine nods quickly, “Right, not ready for humour yet - got it. Okay, here’s the actual part I was looking for,” they take a deep breath and go on, “One of the areas of the brain that is affected by falling in love is the frontal cortex. When in love, it has been found that this area of the brain shuts down. An area of the brain vital to judgment, this effect can make some decision-making in regards to your partner difficult while experiencing these feelings,” they look up at Perry, seeing her slightly softened expression as a good sign to continue, “So, um, my brain is kind of messed up around you. When I made that comment, I wasn’t really thinking clearly. You can blame my complete inability to make rational decisions in your presence on the the fact that I’m completely in love with you.”

Perry takes in a sharp breath and LaFontaine closes the book, toying with the edges before looking back up at her, “I really am, Perr - I love you more than anything else in this world. And that includes every part of you. I’m sorry that wasn’t more clear.”

They stare at each other for a few moments, the seconds waiting for Perry’s reaction shaving years off of LaFontaine’s life. She finally opens her arms and tilts her head, “C’mere.”

LaFontaine grins and lets out a breath, scrambling to throw the book back onto the shelf - which is more difficult than initially expected because, again, this book is almost the size of an infant - and takes the few steps to meet Perry.

When they get there Perry leans forward and captures their lips. LaFontaine goes to lean back but
Perry reaches up and cups their cheek, shaking her head as she presses forward for another kiss. LaFontaine melts into it, breathing all of their relief and appreciation into Perry’s mouth.

Perry pulls LaFontaine closer a little too quickly and they stumble back into the bookshelf, causing a few novels to fall around them. They separate in a fit of giggles, Perry’s shocked expression so cute that LaFontaine can’t resist the urge to lean forward and give one last chaste kiss on the lips.

Perry lets out a content sigh, “I’m sorry I blew up on you. I should have just discussed my feelings with you calmly, but I’ve been a bit stressed,” she pulls back and leans against the bookshelf, looking down and tangling her fingers with LaFontaine’s, “My parents are fighting again.”

LaFontaine sighs, “You could have just said something.”

Perry smiles sadly, “I know, I’m sorry. Some stuff came up about college, which started this stupid argument about whether or not child support needs to continue after I turn 18 if I’m in school. So now they have to involve lawyers again and it’s dragging all of those old fights up.” She plays with a few of LaFontaine’s fingers, “It just feels like I’m ten years old all over again, except they aren’t even living together this time.” Perry sighs and pulls LaFontaine closer, reaching up to move a piece of hair out of their face, “And I’m still reeling from the night we had with your dad the other day. I hate that you have to live like that. It’s just - it’s all been weighing me down.”

They untangle their fingers and reach forward to hold Perry on her waist, “You don’t have to get stressed about my problems.”

“You’re my person,” she leans forward and nudges her nose against LaFontaine’s, “Your problems are always my problems.”

The implication sets off a series of cracks in their heart, the weight of Perry’s pain diminishing their own and pressing down hard against their chest. They put on a brave face and try to crack a smile, “Well, if I’ve learned one thing today it’s that I will never defend your honour again.”

Perry laughs, “I’m sorry, okay? I really didn’t mean to go completely overboard on you like that.”

LaFontaine shakes their head, “Nope, nope - never going to make that mistake again. I now know you are completely capable of holding your own. I’ll just be on the side-lines ready to throw encouraging battle cries and weapons your way.”

“Stop it. I get it, I get it - I overreacted.”

LaFontaine’s smile grows at the sight of Perry failing to control the grin on her face. They continue, “In fact, I’ll just be on the sides cheering you on,” they take a step back and start alternating their arms in the air, mimicking waving pom-poms, “How does this look?”

Perry collapses against the bookshelf in laughter, “How do you manage to embarrass me even with no one around?”

“I’m going to take that as a sign to step up my game,” LaFontaine starts pumping their arms with more enthusiasm, chanting go Perry go in between hops.

“Will you please keep it down?” Perry looks around and rushes forward, grabbing both of LaFontaine’s arms and pulling them down. They look up and can feel the cracks in their heart start to heal at the sight of genuine happiness on Perry’s face.

They kiss Perry one more time - it’s always one more time but as the textbook explained, they can’t help it - before leaning back, “You know, that game earlier reminded me of our first kiss. Do you
remember it?"

“You mean when you kissed me after your fit of jealous rage over me landing on someone in spin
the bottle and not kissing him?” Perry smiles wide, “How could I forget?”

LaFontaine laughs and leans forward to kiss her nose.

(So much for *one more time.*

“You shouldn’t tease. That moment was very important: I like to remember it as the second I woke
up and realized you were the one for me.”

Perry laughs and presses forward for a kiss, murmuring *shut up* against their lips.

(Sometimes they think their life with Perry will just be a series of *one more time’s.*

They sigh as they pull back, “Should we go check on the other delinquents?”

“No, let’s just spend the day here. I really did want to catch up on some homework,” Perry makes a
face, “And never group me in with the term *delinquents* ever again.”

LaFontaine laughs and can feel the familiar pick up of their heart beat.

(Perry will always be their favourite kind of high.)

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“Alright, so we’ve got almost-expired yogurt, three apples and some questionable leftover casserole
dish,” Carmilla pokes her head out and watches Laura hesitantly linger by the cabinets, “What’s your
poison, cutie?”

“Um, I’ll just take an apple.”

She scrunches her nose in disgust as she checks the tupperware holding the casserole, “Good
choice.” She grabs two apples and hip checks the fridge closed behind her. Laura is nervously
drumming her fingers against her thighs from across the room. Carmilla rolls her eyes, “You look
like you’re about to pass out and I already told you we won’t get in trouble here, so please relax.”
She walks to the two-seater couch and plops herself down, stretching across the length of it, “I’m still
trying to wrack my brain around how Little Miss Obedience managed to almost fail a project *and* get
detention.”

She goes to take a bite of her apple and smiles into it, the look of frustration on Laura’s face more
entertaining each time.

Laura makes her way to the couch and rests her hands on the ends, “That was more someone else’s
fault, if my memory serves me right.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows, “Friendly reminder that you fucked up, too.”

*Fine,* Laura sighs and moves to the front of the couch. Carmilla makes no move to adjust herself
and Laura huffs, “Are you going to let me sit?”

Carmilla pretends to consider it and then lifts her legs in the air. Laura takes a seat and instead of
sitting up Carmilla stays laying down, draping her legs over Laura’s lap.

“Um,” Laura holds her arms out at mid-air, “What are you doing?”
“Just stretching out my legs, sweetheart.”

Laura looks pained at the option in front of her. She tries to cross her arms but by the look on her face it must be too uncomfortable. She shifts in her seat and uncrosses her arms, slowly bringing them down to rest on Carmilla’s legs. Carmilla hides her smile into another bite of her apple at the sight of Laura debating between resting her hands or arms on Carmilla’s legs.

“I don’t have leprosy, cupcake. You can touch me.”

Laura’s eyes widen like she’s been caught sneaking snacks from the cookie jar.

(It’s moments like this that Carmilla lives for.)

Laura settles for resting her hands on Carmilla’s calves. She looks increasingly uncomfortable and it’s getting harder for Carmilla to feign indifference when a smile is threatening to break on her face. Laura avoids Carmilla’s eyes, “Your feet smell.”

Carmilla laughs, “Sure they do,” she wiggles them closer to Laura’s face, “Are you sure about that?”

“Stop,” Laura swats at her feet and giggles, glancing nervously towards the door again, “Are you sure we won’t get in trouble here?”

“No one knows that I have the key to this room,” she passes Laura the extra apple and smiles bitterly, “Perks of being the principal’s daughter.”

Laura looks down and bites her lip, turning the apple around in her hand. Carmilla picks at her nail, “Speaking of which: about what you said back in the library. I just want you to know that just because we’re friends doesn’t mean you have to say stuff like that.”

Laura looks to her and furrows her brows, "Stuff like what?"

"You know, the stuff about me and my mom.”

“Well, of course I did. It’s the truth.”

Carmilla pulls her legs back and sits up crossed-legged, leaning into the opposite end of the couch. Laura turns to face her, scooting closer.

(This girl makes nothing easy.)

“You were the one who asked me yesterday about getting special treatment from my mom.”

Laura rolls her eyes, “Yeah, but you were the one who cleared that up by saying you don’t, so why wouldn’t I stick up for you?”

Carmilla shrugs, “I don’t know. How was I supposed to know that you would believe me at face value if you hadn’t said anything?”

Laura sits up a little straighter, putting on an expression of arrogance, "Ehem, as someone once told me: contrary to popular belief, not everyone says every thought that goes through their mind."  
Carmilla narrows her eyes. If Laura wasn't so cute she would probably spend more time considering slapping her. She rolls her eyes, "Ha ha, very funny.”

Laura smiles wide and tilts her head,“You know I see through your facade, right?”
She tenses, “What do you mean?”

“You talk this big game about not caring about things but here you are, alone in the Teachers’ Lounge with me when you could have stayed alone in the library,” she smiles wider, “I’ve figured out your big secret,”

“Laura-”

“Carmilla Karnstein: you want friends.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “Don’t make me throw up this apple all over you.”

“Youuuu waaaaaaant frieeeeeends.”

Carmilla reaches behind her and pulls the pillow out, throwing it in Laura’s face, “You disgust me.”

Laura squeals and laughs, mouth open in shock. She’s about to say something when her phone buzzes. She narrows her eyes and reaches into her pocket, glancing down for a few seconds at the message on her screen, “You’re lucky Kirsch just texted me or else I would have retaliated with absolutely no mercy.”

“Yes, I am oh so lucky;” she runs a hand through her hair, “What did the idiot want?”

“He was just checking in to let me know Danny hasn’t killed him yet.”

“Hmm,” Carmilla offers nothing more. She has a few choice words that she would like to say about a certain red-haired pain in her side, but in the spirit of trying to be a bigger person she holds her tongue.

Laura looks across the room and then back at her, “Hey, does that TV work?”

“Mhm,” she gets up and walks towards it, turning it on and switching through a few channels, “What’ll it be, cupcake?”

“Doesn’t matter to me,” there’s a pause as Carmilla continues to surf the stations, “Carmilla?”

“Hmm?” She turns around and is met with a pillow to the face. She blows out a long breath of air and looks at Laura staring at her with a grin stretching across her face.

“No. Mercy.”

(Everything keeps telling her that this friendship is the biggest mistake of her life. Something tells her she’s going to ignore all of those warnings.)

-----

Girls are such a mystery. Honestly. It’s not something Kirsch usually admits because he likes to think that he knows quite a lot about girls for a guy his age. But it’s moments like this - when Danny is shaking the vending machine with a violent rage matching some of the strongest cornerbacks on his team - that make him question everything.

“Dude, I’m pretty sure it’s a lost cause.”

Danny turns to him with a glare, reminding him of his mom’s face when he came home with his third speeding ticket. He shrugs, “Or, you know, you can give it one more try.”
After roaming the halls for twenty minutes, they finally found a working vending machine.

(With every faulty machine Kirsch’s smug grin grew tenfold. The subtle look of frustration and embarrassment on Danny’s face when he mockingly said *why wouldn’t they be working?* was worth the punch she gave him to the shoulder.)

Unfortunately for Danny, once Kirsch got his chocolate from the vending machine it decided to stop working. Her chocolate bar hangs by the clutches of the wire spring in the machine – something that she clearly doesn’t seem deterred by in the slightest. In fact, Kirsch has spent the last fifteen minutes sitting across from the machine just watching Danny relentlessly go at the poor thing.

“If I just hip check it,” she rams into the machine a few times, “at the right angle,” another few hits, “I think I’ll get it.”

Kirsch sighs, “We could just, like, share if you want.”

Danny turns to him, glancing between him and the vending machine, “I really think I’ve got this.”

“You honestly don’t.”

“Wanna bet?”

“Sorry, I’ve got no money left since I just spent my last dollar on a chocolate bar for you.”

Danny shuts up at that. Kirsch smiles to himself. He’s on such a roll today.

He opens the wrapper of his Kit Kat bar and makes a show of taking his first bite, “Mmm. This is so delicious.”

Danny leans against the machine and crosses her arms, “I’m not above castration you know.”

“Bro, that’s sexist.”

He knows it’s not. Growing up in a house with two strong-willed women taught him words like *sexist* and *misogyny* and *feminism* by the time he was 11. But the way Danny’s ears go pink and her jaw clenching so strongly that he expects her to shatter her teeth is too good of an opportunity to pass up.

She’s still silently seething when he rolls his eyes and gets up, walking over and breaking off two sticks for her, “Just take this so I don’t have to hear your bitching anymore.”

Danny scowls at him, but grabs the pieces and takes a large bite, “Kit Kat sucks.”

“Dude, if you actually hate it give it back to me ‘cause I’m starving.”

“You ate the entire box of donuts and five cans of pop less than two hours ago.”

He shrugs, “I’m a growing boy.”

Danny groans and smacks the back of her head against the glass. Kirsch can tell she doesn’t think he’s that intelligent – which he’s used to from most people, by now – and by this point it’s not really worth it to try and convince people otherwise. Besides, he kind of finds it amusing. He gets to get away with saying stupid things and then get the little victory of watching the people around him get frustrated. If no one is going to believe in him, he might as well take advantage of it.

(When it's someone like Danny, it’s particularly more satisfying.)
After her fourth tap against the glass they hear a rattle and bang at the bottom of the machine.

“Looks like it just needed a thick skull to do the trick.”

Danny doesn’t even bother to glare at him, choosing to bend down and grab the chocolate bar instead. But Kirsch can still see the edge of her cheek pinking up.

(Yeah, he is definitely on a roll today.)

He looks at her expectantly and she raises her eyebrows, “What?”

“I gave you half of my Kit Kat bar. You owe me half of yours.”

She laughs, “Not a chance.”

“But I paid for it and everything. I deserve it.”

“Is that what you said the last time you had sex?”

He balls his hands into fists and blows out a deep breath from his nose. He’s all for treating girls equally, but he could never bring himself to actually hit one. If this was one of the Zetas he would have done it without blinking an eye, but he thinks of his mom and sister and just can’t do it.

The problem is on most days Danny makes it extremely difficult for him to remember that she’s not just another one of the guys.

(The worst part is he thinks part of her knows this and is trying to test him.)

“Low blow, Lawrence.”

She rolls her eyes and breaks her chocolate bar in half, “So I don’t have to hear your bitching.”

He smiles, “Thanks,” he looks down the hall, “I guess we should get back.”

Danny lingers by the machine, glancing down the hallway. She has a far-off look in her eye and there’s something about her posture that’s a bit too stiff even for her usual, “I think I’m going to wander around for a bit.”

“Want some company?”

She levels him a look, “What makes you think I want to spend more time with you than was absolutely necessary?”

If it wasn’t for the weird way she’s acting, he would point out that she was the one who said she was going to come with him in the first place. It’s not like he forced her here. But Kirsch feels generous today.

“I don’t know, just thought we could find something fun to do.”

She scoffs, “Fat chance at that.”

“Fine, whatever,” he goes to head in the opposite direction when he hears her over his shoulder.

“What did you have in mind?”

He smiles to himself and shakes his head, “See if you can keep up and you’ll find out.”
They wander down the hall, the only sound the scuff of their shoes against the tile. After watching TV for a few hours in the Teachers’ Lounge, Laura became impatient and wanted to stretch her legs. (They did find out that they both surprisingly are very into America’s Next Top Model. Laura was thrilled; Carmilla adds it to the list of things she will end up regretting after today.)

“I’ve gotta say: this was probably the easiest punishment I’ve ever done. I thank the God I don’t believe in for lazy teachers who don’t assign actual work during detention.”

Laura turns to her and smiles, “At least they didn’t lock us in a tiny room.”

Carmilla stills, “What?”

“Oh! Or even better: at least we didn’t have to write a cheesy essay about ‘who we think we are,’” Laura pauses, “I wonder what my archetype would be, actually. I’m thinking it might be Lois Lane - you know, because I want to be a reporter. What do you think yours would be?”

She trails her hand along the row of lockers, focusing on the cool feel of metal against skin, “I don’t really know what you’re referring to.”

Laura laughs, “The Breakfast Club, obviously.”

She makes a face and turns to her, “Is that some sort of school program you’re involved in? Because I don’t do extracurriculars.”

She’s suddenly stopped by a very strong and very tiny grasp around her wrist, “Is this one of your sarcastic ‘I don’t care about anything’ jokes, or do you honestly not know what I’m talking about?”

Carmilla wills the heat at the back of her neck to cool down. She stands taller and tries to feign nonchalance, shrugging, “I’m afraid I’m at a loss.”

Laura’s eyes grow three times it’s size and Carmilla feels a little sick to her stomach for almost finding it cute. She sighs as Laura starts to pace, “The Breakfast Club,” she turns back to Carmilla, “One of the most iconic 80s movies of all time? The classic high school coming of age story?” She looks at Carmilla incredulously, “None of this is ringing a bell?”

“Nope. Sorry, cutie.”

Laura begins to shake with frustration and groans, “You can’t be serious!” She shakes her head, “Okay, okay - hold on.” Laura steps back and motions for Carmilla to give her some room. Carmilla moves and leans against a locker, “Just so you know: I’m not a big fan of interpretive dance.”

“Will you shut up for five seconds?”

Carmilla doesn’t stop the smile growing on her face. She likes Laura best when she has a bit of a punch. Her tiny delivery of it is such a juxtaposition that it almost makes Carmilla believe she deserves it, which she can admire.

Laura closes her eyes for a few seconds and blows out a couple of deep breaths. She opens her eyes and looks at Carmilla with what can only be described as light intimidation. She raises her hand and points her finger, lowering her voice, “Don’t mess with the bull, young man. You’ll get the horns.”
She gives one last longing look for good measure and then turns to walk away. After a few steps she twirls around and skips back towards Carmilla, “Do you know what I’m talking about now?”

“The only thing I know now is that you should never be allowed to watch movies without adult supervision.”

Laura groans, “Alright, that’s it - give me your phone.”

Carmilla lets out a short laugh, “You know that worked for you once but it’s not working again.”

“Carm,” Laura blows out a breath, “I need it to look up the trailer online to confirm this cinematic atrocity.”

“And you can’t use your phone because…?”

Laura turns a shade of pink as she fidgets with her fingers.

(It looks good on her.)

She bites the inside of her cheek as she watches Laura continue to squirm, “Well?”

Laura huffs, “My dad disabled my data until the end of the month.”

“No wifi?”

The pink on her cheeks deepen. It reminds Carmilla of the shade of the twilight sky on the long nights she spends out on her roof. It’s always been her favourite time of day, where the light is ready to leave but the night is yet to begin. She thinks of the light fading away, the dark night eagerly chasing after it. There’s a quiet comfort in the hazy ambiguity of this time, where night foolishly hopes that maybe this time the opposites can meet and live in harmony.

(Carmilla looks at Laura and sees so much light that it’s almost blinding.)

Laura is too busy burning holes into the ground to notice Carmilla’s staring, “I may have watched the entire One Direction documentary on youtube from my phone and ate my whole month’s worth of data in two hours.”

Carmilla thrusts her hands into her pockets and digs her nails into the tops of her thighs to stop herself from laughing, “Right. Of course. How stupid of me to have not figured that out already.” Her words are dripping with sarcasm but the way Laura scowls at her affirms that it was a good choice. She quirks her eyebrow, “No wifi?”

“Oh,” Laura hesitates, her cheeks continue to burn with the twilight sky, “I accidentally turned it off last night and don’t really know how to turn it back on.”

Carmilla can’t hold her laugh any longer and Laura turns on her, “I’m just not that good with technology! Don’t be a jerk.”

Laura is pouting at her - honest to God pouting - and it is a wonder that Carmilla has spent this long around her without putting in her earphones and ignoring her existence. She guesses it has something to do with the way her face lights up on the rare times she’s not being annoying.

(She shines so bright. It outweighs the bad.)

Carmilla shakes her head before staring and leaning in close - Laura sucking in a sudden short breath - as she reaches forward and slowly grabs Laura's phone out of her pocket.
Laura gulps and darts her tongue out to wet her lips, “That could be considered stealing, you know.”

Carmilla ignores her and fiddles with the settings. The phone background is a photo from what looks like a night out with LaFontaine and Danny. She pushes down the tiny ache in her chest that briefly wonders what it would look like with her image there instead.

“There you go, cupcake,” she hands Laura her phone back, “All fixed.”

Laura opens a browser to confirm and squeals when the page loads without hesitation, “Thank you!”

Carmilla feels fire along her arm where Laura briefly squeezes in appreciation. Fixing the phone seems worth it by the look on Laura’s face, until Carmilla is suddenly being dragged to the ground.

“Woah there, sweetheart. Didn’t take you for an exhibitionist.”

“Please shut up.”

“You say that a lot for someone who hasn’t made any indication to actually make me.”

She smirks but soon realizes her hopes to share some playful flirting are useless. Fixing that phone was possibly the worst decision of her life because the next forty-five minutes are spent having to sit in the middle of the hall and listen to Laura dissect a two minute clip in excruciating detail.

She wonders if there is any aspect of Laura’s life that the girl doesn’t show an unrelenting dedication and eagerness towards. She should be more annoyed, but the scrunched up face she makes every time Carmilla confirms that she knows absolutely nothing about this movie is kind of attractive in a you-look-innocent-but-would-probably-be-kinky-in-bed sort of way.

(She makes sure to bring up her lack of knowledge quite a lot during this discussion.)

Laura’s phone goes off in the middle of her 13th mundane fact about the movie and she looks to Carmilla apologetically. It’s adorable that she thinks Carmilla actually cares about any of this.

“That was LaFontaine and Perry. They just wanted to let us know they’re going to heading back to the group area soon.”

“You know I’m absolutely devastated that their text interrupted this educational session.”

Laura rolls her eyes and gets up, offering her hand to Carmilla. She grabs it, Laura’s hands colder than she expected. She feels a small thump in her chest at the thought of ways that could keep them warmer. They stand face to face and Laura suddenly looks shy, “Sorry for rambling. I get kind of excited sometimes.”

She shrugs, “It’s okay. It was better than having to listen to that comic bullshit earlier.”

“You don’t have to humour me.”

“No, I’m not,” she lingers in front of her, “The enthusiasm is kind of cute.”

Laura smiles and nods, turning and starting down the hall, “One of these days I’ll find something you’re this passionate about.”

“Goodluck, sweetheart.”

(The light shines so bright, not even Carmilla can find it in herself to try and snuff it out.)
“Okay, we’ve gotta do a best out of three now.”

Danny wipes some sweat from her brow, “You just don’t want to leave knowing I was the last one to win.”

“You didn’t see me complaining when you asked for a re-match after I won the first game.”

It’s a miracle she hasn’t given him a black eye yet. She checks the basketball to him and gets into a defensive stance, “Fine. Let’s just do this, asshole.”

Kirsch is already putting up a bit more effort this time. The first game was fairly close – 21 to 18 – but her previous win of 21 to 12 must have bruised a bit of his ego. Danny likes to attribute her first loss to a few lucky shots he got in near the beginning, which makes this final game worth it in the end if it will finally prove how much better she is than him.

This game picks up a bit faster than the rest. It’s already 17 to 13 for Danny when she’s at the top of the key and Kirsch suddenly blurts out, “My sister got beat up by a kid on our street when she first came out in her sophomore year.”

She stumbles a bit on her dribble, "What?"

He smiles softly, “And you call me fumbles?”

“Fuck off,” she does a few dribbles and avoids a swipe at the ball, “So you’re bringing up your sister why?”

He shrugs, “Most kids at school were cool with her, but there used to be this super Christian family at the end of our street,” she takes advantage of his fit of nostalgia and charges forward to do a lay-up. She checks the ball back to him after it goes in and he continues, “This asshole,” he makes a face, “Jackson Stewart – he corners Sarah one day after school and starts pushing her around.”

His dribbles have significantly slowed down and she takes a step forward, “What happened?”

He stops and holds the ball against his hip, “She was a bit shaken but luckily I was riding my bike by that park and decked him right in the face.”

She can’t stop the grin, “How valiant of you.”

“Yeah, it would’ve been,” he scratches at his head, “If Jackson didn’t totally kick my ass afterwards.”

She laughs, “I wish I could say I was surprised, but I’ve seen your left-hook and it wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

He scowls, “It was the thought that counted, okay?” He sighs, “The point is that Sarah had to come out to my mom to explain why we were both beat up. But my mom was totally cool about it and has never treated her differently because of who she is, which is a big reason why I look up to her so much.”

Danny can feel a tightness in her chest and she tries to ignore it as Kirsch continues, “I guess what I’m trying to say is I’m sorry to hear about your parents. That's really not cool of them.”

She tenses, “I don’t care about that.”
“I’m calling bullshit.”

She can feel her cheeks flare and she hopes to God that they were already red from playing the game, “It’s not a big deal. They’re never going to change and I’ve already accepted that.”

Kirsch nods and looks everywhere but at her, “So, do you, like,” he pauses, “I don’t know – wanna talk about it or something?”

She freezes, “What?”

He turns the ball over in his hand, avoiding her eyes, “I don’t know. Don’t chicks like to talk and shit?”

There are 42 insults on the tip of her tongue, but she has to admit that he does seem to be making a genuine effort, so she spares him in the nicest way possible, “No offense, but you’re probably the last person on this planet I would talk to about this.”

(The nicest way possible. That doesn’t mean entirely nice.)

“So you’d rather talk to someone like Carmilla over me?”

Her cheeks burn and she feels the vile rise to the top of her throat, “Fuck off.”

He sighs, “I didn’t mean to piss you off. I just could tell she got to you. And for the record, what she said was totally uncool.”

“Uh, thanks.”

He smiles and looks at her, but she can’t find any trace of malice or ingenuity. She pauses, realizing that this feels frighteningly close to bonding and that is territory she never wants to get into with him. She decides to rectify this by lunging forward and pulling his pants down, laughing as he drops the ball and trips over himself.

“What the fuck?”

She laughs harder at his face when she turns around after doing another lay-up, “Sometimes I play dirty. That’s game point.”

“You’re such a bitch, you know that?”

She clutches at her side after her laughter hasn’t subsided and she feels her phone vibrate in her pocket. She pulls it out and sees a few texts.

LaF (2:43pm): You gotta haul ass back to the library…Jenson came back pretty pissed you were gone

LaF (2:44pm): We stalled saying you were all coincidentally in the bathroom, but he’s def not convinced…I think he’s out looking in the halls

“Fuck,” she looks up at Kirsch, “We have to get back to the library.”

He’s about to say something but another few texts come through.

Laura (2:46pm): MR. JENSON IS MAD WE AREN’T IN THE LIBRARY, PLS HURRY BACK!!!!

Laura (2:46pm): BRING KIRSCH IF YOU HAVEN’T KILLED HIM YET!!!!!!!!!!
She can't help the laugh that bursts out, “Okay, we need to leave now.”

He’s still scrambling to pull up his pants – he tripped again after his first attempt to get up – and she runs over to help him. They’re rushing out the gym doors when she sees Carmilla and Laura running towards them, Laura dragging Carmilla down the hall by the arm.

“Oh my God, you’re alive!”

Danny rolls her eyes, “Jenson isn’t going to actually kill us, Laura.”

“I was talking to Kirsch.”

She laughs and grins, Kirsch and herself falling into a run beside them. They turn a corner and Carmilla abruptly holds her arms out and skids to a halt, forcing them to stumble forward as she tries to push them back. Danny is about to throw her into a locker when she notices that Mr. Jenson is walking away from them at the end of the hall, checking all of the rooms. Once they’re safely back around the corner and out of sight Carmilla turns to them, “Okay, cut through the cafeteria to get back to the library and I’ll go distract him to stall for time.”

Laura shakes her head, “What? No, that’s crazy. That’s ridiculous,” she turns to them, “Tell her, guys.”

She looks to Kirsch and they both shrug, “Sounds kind of brilliant to me.”

Laura scowls and turns back to Carmilla, “You can’t do this.”

“I literally have zero time to argue this,” she looks at Danny and Kirsch, “Please pick her up and drag her back if you have to.”

She’s about to round the corner when Danny calls out to her. Carmilla pauses and looks back, “Thanks, Carmilla.”

Carmilla smiles, “No problem, Big Red.”

She’s off and it’s only a few seconds when she can hear Carmilla loudly call out, “Hey, Jenson! I forgot to tell you earlier: thanks for bringing Mom jeans back in style.”

Laura looks completely horrified but they have no time to waste, so her and Kirsch pull her each by an arm and set off down the hall.

(Maybe today is a day of surprises. She’ll figure out what that means when she’s not running for her life.)

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“I can’t believe you got another Saturday detention for us.”

Carmilla walks down the front steps and shrugs, “You all have commitments and shit. All I have going is the next chapter of this book,” she turns to the group, “If you idiots can all manage to stay out of trouble next week maybe I’ll get to read it in peace.”

Laura smiles at her. It’s becoming a game to find out how many times Carmilla does something kind and tries to pass it off as nothing.

(She should start some sort of tally.)
They all get to the bottom of stairs and Kirsch turns to them, “Are you guys doing anything tonight?”

“I think I’ve hit my nerd quota for the day,” Carmilla pauses to consider it, “Quite possibly for the year, actually.”

He rolls his eyes and addresses the rest of the group, “I’m throwing a party with the Zetas at my house. You should all come.”

LaFontaine looks to Perry, “I don’t really have anything planned. Wanna go?”

She shrugs, “It’ll probably be more fun than what we already had planned.”

(Laura guesses that included reruns of F.R.I.E.N.D.S. and making out, but she figures they like to be social sometimes, too.)

“Sweet,” he turns to Danny and hesitates, “Listen, Danny-”

“I’ll come,” she quickly turns to LaFontaine, “Can I get a ride back with you? We’d just need to stop by my house so I can grab a change of clothes if you don’t mind. It’s just easier than busing.”

They nod, “Of course,” they wave, “See you guys there.”

They fall into step with Perry and Laura watches as Danny avoids Kirsch’s stare and promptly turns to follow them without saying goodbye.

“So what about you guys?”

Carmilla opens her mouth to no doubt make some sort of sarcastic comment but Laura interrupts her, “We actually have plans.”

Carmilla looks at her, “Oh?”

“Mhm.”

Kirsch nods, “That’s cool. Maybe next time?”

“Not like-“

“Sure, Kirsch.”

He walks away and Carmilla turns to her, “You know, I usually like discussing plans before people assume that I’m going to pop up at places.”

Laura smiles and looks down, “Uh, yeah. Sorry. I meant to ask you before but then we had the Jenson scare and I got so caught up in that that in my mind I had already asked you and you said yes.”

“You’re making it a habit of getting very presumptuous with me, you know.”

She blushes, “I’m sorry.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “So what are we doing?”

She grins, “We’re watching The Breakfast Club.”

“Oh God, would you look at the time?” Carmilla makes a show of looking at her watch-less wrist, “I
“Carmilla, come on,” she nervously tucks a piece of hair behind her ear, “I mean, if you’d rather go to the party then I totally understand.”

(Carmilla does not need to know that she has already planned the majority of the night in her head, which includes watching the movie with and without the DVD commentary, listening to the full soundtrack and discussing in detail which character they are more like and why.)

“I have to admit that a night with you does sound slightly more appealing than hanging around those losers.”

Laura grins and bites her lip, “I’ll call my dad to pick us up before you change your mind.”

Carmilla sits on the curb while she pulls out her phone, the smile never leaving Laura's face throughout the whole phone call.

(Maybe LaFontaine was onto something: today was awesome.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags #hsau updates for chapter updates and #carmilla hsau for general updates on the AU.
Will You Call My Name?

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 4, or the one that was supposed to be a fluffy chapter until we actually watched the Breakfast Club.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Misgendering & Homophobic Slurs

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Carmilla has been in the backseat of a police cruiser for eight minutes now, which she allows herself to be proud of.

She’s not comfortable in the back of a police car. She’s not comfortable around the police, the same way she isn’t comfortable around teachers or politicians or, as she’d come to distrust as a rule, anyone with authority.

Or small closets, which isn’t exactly relevant, but the tightening in her chest and the death grip she has on the leather seats aren’t unfamiliar to her. This isn’t the kind of thing Carmilla has to worry about.

(Until she starts making friends with the sheriff’s daughter. Great job, Karnstein.)

And the bars separating her from the front seat? Not exactly helping, and very relevant to her fear of small closets.

But Laura’s Dad is in civilian clothing and he's making a joke about baseball or the weather or something that Laura seems to find hilarious, and the way she throws her head back to laugh is making things easier. Carmilla occupies her mind by trying to decide whether Laura has this man completely wrapped around her finger or if he actually does enjoy listening to annoying doses of Top 40.

She can sympathize if it’s the first one.

They stop at a drive thru to pick up tacos, which Carmilla finds herself completely unprepared for. The menu is elaborate and she never knew tacos had this much variety. She orders three of them and something called a crunch wrap that Laura’s father highly recommends.

Laura puts them all in a box and takes the opportunity to move into the backseat.

(“So we can share,” she explains.)

Her father cracks a couple of jokes about Laura tossing her old man to the curb for her new friend and Laura laughs it off.
“What did you say you girls were going to watch? Nothing too mature, I hope?” He raises an eyebrow at Laura in the rear view mirror.

“Dad, we’re just watching the Breakfast Club.”

This seems to satisfy him. “That’s a good movie.”

“Right? I can’t believe she hasn’t seen it. I mean, it’s like, a total classic.”

“She’s very excited about this.” Carmilla tells him.

He laughs. “You haven’t seen excited.”

“I think I’m a little afraid to.”

“Watch this.” He turns to look at them briefly as he drives. “Carmilla, do you know who Louis Tomlinson is?”

Laura huffs. “Dad, I have other interests.”

“Who’s Louis Tomlinson?” Carmilla takes a bite of her crunch wrap and wow, he was not wrong to recommend this. She almost completely misses the rant that Laura launches herself into in efforts to explain exactly who Louis Tomlinson is. Apparently he’s in a boy band, but he’s completely irrelevant compared to this crunch wrap.

She wishes she had ordered two.

“And I mean he’s totally inspirational too, everyone told him he would never do anything with his life but now he writes most of the lyrics for the band and he does all this extra charity work, you know?”

Carmilla nods like she’s not thinking about how she’s going to get her hands on another crunch wrap in the next 24 hours and Laura continues to ramble about boy bands like she doesn’t have three tacos growing cold in the cardboard box between them.

Her father shakes his head and looks at Carmilla in the mirror. She smiles at him, partly because his daughter is the textbook definition of adorable, but mostly because this is the man that introduced her to the crunch wrap.

When they reach her house, Laura explains to Carmilla that she doesn’t actually have a TV in her bedroom, but there is an entertainment center in the basement. Which is probably for the best. Laura’s bedroom is not a place she expects to be held accountable for her thoughts. The basement, with it’s comfortable couch and respectable level of cleanliness, seems more manageable.

Carmilla soon discovers that Laura should never be allowed control of the remote. This is a power she abuses. The movie hasn’t even begun when she pauses it for the first time to preface the movie.

“Okay, but the really cool thing about this movie, and it’s something you probably wouldn’t even pick up on unless someone told you, which is why I’m telling you, but anyway, the whole movie is pretty much completely improvised.” Carmilla doesn’t press her for more information but clearly, Laura doesn’t need her to. “Which I think is kind of awesome because it’s all very real, you know? It totally brings the characters to life.”

Carmilla swipes the remote before Laura can start in on another sentence and hits play. Laura’s face scrunches up in disapproval and Carmilla tosses her a playful smile when she reaches to grab a handful of popcorn from the bowl on Laura’s lap.
Laura moves the bowl so it’s between them.

Eight minutes in, the teacher that reminds Carmilla far too much of Mr. Beckett fixes the only character she even sort of likes with a stare and a point of his finger.

“Don’t mess with the bull, young man, you’ll get the horns.”

Laura slaps at Carmilla’s leg. “See? Get it now?”

Carmilla puts her feet up on the coffee table and raises her eyebrows, unimpressed.

A few minutes later, Carmilla decides she likes the guy with the long hair and rebel attitude.

“What do you guys do in your club?” He asks the nerdy kid, Brian, she thinks. He reminds her of Laura.

“In Physics Club we uh, we talk about Physics. Uh, properties of physics.”

“So, it’s sort of social.” He rationalizes. “Demented and sad, but social, right?”

She grins. “This guy’s not so bad.”

"Bender? Yeah. You two have a lot in common."

"We both think the rich girl’s kinda hot."

Laura tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. "Molly Ringwald is really pretty. I mean, she was. She’s like forty now so, not so much."

Laura pauses again when they’re in the middle of a scene that Carmilla is getting increasingly bored of.

“Look, you guys keep up your talkin’ and Vernon’s gonna come right in here. I got a meet next Saturday, and I’m not gonna miss it on account of you boneheads.”

Bender raises his fist and vibrates with dramatic emphasis. “Oh, wouldn’t that be a bite? Missin’ a whole wrestlin’ meet.”

“You wouldn’t know anything about it, faggot.”

Carmilla sighs when she hears the all too familiar click of the remote.

"I just want you to know that even though this is one of my favorite movies, I obviously don’t condone that kind of language.” She unpauses without another word.

Carmilla considers saying something along the lines of "Sweetheart, I’m not that fragile" but settles for chastising herself and adding it to the list of things giving her false hope

She zones in and out throughout the movie, going from focusing on the characters to Laura to the string of thread on the seam of her jeans. She picks at it and tugs while the kids angst over their parents or classes or something else that she can’t bother to focus on long enough to understand. She zones back in when she notices Laura shift in her seat.

Bender leans in close to the Prom Queen. “Are you a virgin? I’ll bet you a million dollars that you are. Let’s end the suspense. Is it gonna be a white wedding?”
“Why don’t you just shut up?”

“Have you ever kissed a boy on the mouth? Have you ever been felt up? Over the bra, under the blouse...” His voice drops to a whisper. “Your shoes off, hoping to God your parents don’t walk in?”

“Do you want me to puke?”

This is a feeling Carmilla can sympathize with.

“Over the panties... no bra. Blouse unbuttoned, Calvins in a ball on the front seat, past eleven on a school night?

It’s all a bit too straight for Carmilla to properly enjoy, but she can certainly appreciate the way Laura is frozen, not looking away from the screen. She wipes the insides of her palms down the side of her jeans in what Carmilla can only assume was an attempt to be subtle.

"You okay there, sunshine?"

"Actually, you know what? I just remembered um, a super fun fact. This whole library scene was actually filmed in a real gymnasium. They just, they just turned it into a library."

"We really need to reevaluate your definition of fun."

- 

Danny separates from the group the moment they walk through the door, immediately latching herself onto a group of Summer Society girls hovering around a table by the stairs. LaFontaine reaches a hand behind them to grip Perry’s fingers for a moment.

“Well,” Perry announces. “This is. Loud.”

LaFontaine cringes because, yeah, this isn’t exactly what they had in mind when Kirsch invited them to a party. Although in all likelihood, Perry’s definition was significantly tamer and probably only went so far as to imagine a wild game of pictionary.

There’s loud music coming from another room, and a keg, and about thirty boxes of pizza that they wouldn’t touch if they were dying of starvation sitting on the coffee table. Kirsch disappears quickly into a hallway after tossing out a later, babes.

LaFontaine turns to face a very distressed Perry. “Want a drink? Just one, I promise.”

She eyes the keg in the living room, her eyes widening at the sight of three boys lifting a football player onto his head over it. “Um. Maybe-”

“Oh, that’s not happening.” LaFontaine shakes their head. “I’m gonna be honest, I have no idea how to work a keg. Kitchen?”

“That’s probably a better idea.”

They take her hand and weave through the crowd into the kitchen. There’s a bowl full of chips on the counter and LaFontaine swipes one on their way to the refrigerator.

“Sweetheart, shouldn’t we take from the punch bowl?”

“You really wanna risk that?” They glance at the bowl on the island and grimace. “That thing’s a lottery. And trust me, nobody wins.”
Perry sighs. “Fine. But I still think we’re invading their privacy.” She says while LaFontaine swings open the refrigerator door. Perry gestures towards the groceries. “I mean, how are we expected to know what we’re allowed to take?”

“Perr, they opened their house to fifty teenagers. At least twelve of which will, statistically, end up screwing in one of their coat closets. I think we can grab a beer.” They lean on the top of the door, waiting for Perry to relent and agree.

It doesn’t happen.

It’s then that Kirsch shows up with two drinks in hand. “Here you go, ladies.”

Perry frowns but accepts the drink. “Thank you, Kirsch.”

He nods and hands the other one to LaFontaine. They close the refrigerator door and lean back against the appliance door, taking a sip.

It tastes awful, which is to be expected. They fake a smile at Kirsch and he seems satisfied enough to walk away with a proud smile.

There’s a moment of silent sipping and LaFontaine half expects Perry to give in and discard the drink into the sink. It would probably be their safest bet, but they trust Kirsch just enough to keep drinking.

“Do you think he knows?” Perry asks and bites her lip in that way that tells them exactly what she’s talking about.

“How would he?”

“Well, you heard him earlier today.” She shrugs. “He knows about the GSA.”

“Yeah, but Jake told him.”

“What if that’s not all Jake told him?” Perry raises her eyebrows and LaFontaine shakes their head.

“No, he wouldn’t do that. Perr, don’t worry about it. The GSA kids can tell people about the GSA, they know it’s just my Mom that can’t know.”

“I know, but—”

“Stop worrying.” They want to reach out and hold her hand, rub their thumb over her palm and kiss her until she relaxes. If they were alone, they would. “There’s no way he knows about us.”

Perry’s voice drops to a whisper. The party is still loud and the kitchen is still almost empty, but it’s almost habit now. “I’m not worried about us, I’m worried about you.”

“Oh.”

“You don’t think that Jake would—”

They shake their head. “No way. He knows it’s not his secret to tell.” LaFontaine shrugs. “And either way, he just called us both ladies. It wouldn’t make sense for him to know.”

Perry bites her lip and nods at her cup, and suddenly it does make sense.

“C’mon, have you met Kirsch? He wouldn’t do that if he knew.”
She smiles at that and nods. “You’re right, I’m sorry. I’m just—”

“Worried. I know. It’s your thing, it’s cute.”

She smiles and looks down the hallway at a group of teenagers. “If we weren’t, um...”

“I know. Me too.”

They wish they had something to write ‘L+P’ on but their options are sort of limited. Two red solo cups don’t provide a lot of space for romantic creativity. “You know it’s a shame we can’t ‘cause...,”

They cringe at the sight of two teenagers making out against a bookcase in the hallway. “We are way cuter than them.”

Perry follows their line of sight, mirroring their expression with significantly more shock.

LaFontaine nods. “Like, way cuter. We could probably set records.”

The words do wonders for wiping off the disgust on her face. “You think?”

“With you contributing to half the cuteness factor? Always.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Perry bumps her cup with theirs and LaFontaine’s heart swells.

(What’s one more reason to love this girl, anyway?)

- "Alright, girls. That’s thirty minutes for lunch." Vernon announces.

Laura pauses the movie.

(Yes, she knows that she keeps doing it, but this one is important.)

“You know, this is how you can tell this movie was written and directed predominantly by men because no self respecting woman would let someone use ‘girls’ as a derogatory term. Danny and I went on a pretty impressive rant to LaF’s dad when we watched the Breakfast Club at th—” She stumbles over the pronoun, this isn’t a conversation anyone but LaFontaine should be having with Carmilla. “At LaF’s house. Th- Laf’s Dad kept arguing with us and saying it was just a joke, which it’s obviously not.”

Carmilla doesn’t respond and Laura realizes she hasn’t actually said anything in a while, despite the fact that Laura has paused the movie on several occasions to make conversation. Laura tries to not take it as an insult.

Technically, this is a good thing. Maybe she’s just a low maintenance friend.

- Ten minutes pass without Laura pausing the movie and Carmilla is starting to hope that she won’t have to break the remote in the next half hour in order for them to actually finish this movie. Carmilla reaches for the soda on the coffee table as Bender starts doing impressions.

“Here’s my impression of life at Big Bri’s house.” He cups a hand around his mouth and calls out. "Son?" Making dimple impressions in his cheeks with his index fingers, he smiles. “Yeah, Dad?” He turns back. “How’s your day, pal?” Again, with the dimples. “Great, Dad! Hows yours?”

Carmilla lets out a puff of air with a smile. This impression is spot on for what Laura and her Dad are
“Super. Say, son, how’d you like to go fishing this weekend?” He says while he casts an imaginary line into the imaginary water in front of him. “Great, Dad. But I’ve got homework to do.” He replies with a pout. “That’s alright, son. You can do it on the boat!”

Bender turns to his imaginary wife now. “Dear, isn’t our son swell?” He turns again, “Yes, dear. Isn’t life swell?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes. Nobody’s family is that perfect, but she can appreciate his sarcasm. Bender puts an arm around his imaginary wife and son and gives them an imaginary kiss, followed by a punch to the mouth. He adds a sound effect for emphasis and Carmilla actually finds herself fighting a laugh.

“Alright, what about your family?” The athlete asks.

“Oh, mine? It’s real easy.” He puffs up his chest, lowers his voice, and points at his imaginary son. “Stupid, worthless, no good, god damn freeloadin’ son of a bitch, retarded big mouthed know-it-all asshole, jerk.” He crosses his arms, switching roles. “You forgot ugly, lazy, and disrespectful.”


The athlete challenges him and Carmilla rolls her eyes again. She should start a drinking game for every time the boys in this film start another pissing contest. It could distract her from the way she can feel her heartbeat pick up.

“You believe this?” Bender pulls up his sleeve to reveal a mark on his arm. She recognizes it, a burn mark. “Huh? It’s about the size of a cigar. Do I stutter? See this is what you get in my house when you spill paint in the garage.”

Carmilla turns her attention to Laura. She’s tense as she watches Bender go off on himself and Carmilla watches as she develops a pout. She pities him. Despite the fact that she disagrees with most of what he does, she pities him.

This girl is far too good for Carmilla.

She takes a deep breath through her nose and tugs at the thread on her jeans, it’s at least three times as long as it was when they started this movie.

Kirsch is about to greet Perry and LaF again on his way through the kitchen when he sees the look they’re sharing. Perry is laughing, leaning in towards LaFontaine, who has a hand on her elbow. Kirsch halts mid-step and turns on his heel. He sets his drinks on the shelf to the left of him and leans back against the wall outside the kitchen. He doesn’t know them well, just that they’re Laura’s friends.

But he knows a private moment when he sees one.

Kirsch checks his watch. It’s been two minutes, which is like, a reasonably cool amount of time. He didn’t want to seem too eager, so this was good. He picks up the drinks off the shelf.

Two beers: one regular; one light, extra ice.
He weaves through the room, nodding at Sam and carefully sidestepping past two guys arm wrestling at the coffee table. He sees Natalie at the table on the other side of the room and offers her a lopsided smile. She waves at him and he holds up her drink.

And then Tucker moves out of the way.

*And Danny is there.*

Kirsch’s jaw clenches. No, this definitely isn’t happening. This is his *one chance* to get back with Natalie and Danny God Damn Lawrence is not about to fuck it up.

They’re chatting when he walks up, drinks in hand. It seems innocent.

He knows it’s not.

“Hey, Nat. Watcha ‘doin.” He asks with a glare at Danny.

Natalie doesn’t speak, but Danny does. She gives him a smile that he *knows* is all bullshit and says, “Hey! We were just talking about you.”

Kirsch narrows his eyes. “Yeah? What about.”

Danny shrugs. “Oh, you know. Girl stuff.”

“Girl stuff.” He echoes.

Natalie nods and touches Danny’s arm. “Yeah, we just thought we’d catch up.” They share a look and Danny smiles at her.

“It’s been a while, you know?” She shrugs. “And we didn’t exactly end on nice terms.” They both laugh and Kirsch tightens his grip on the cups growing heavy in his hands.

Natalie runs a hand through her hair. “We had some good times, though.”

“Oh, yeah. Definitely.” Danny takes a drink from the cup that Kirsch suddenly realizes she’s sharing with Natalie.

“Good times?” He asks.

“Yeah.” Danny nods with that same sickly sweet smile. “We used to date a long time ago.”

Kirsch purses his lips. “Well, you know what they say. All good things must come to an end, or whatever.”

Natalie opens her mouth to speak but Kirsch cuts her off. “You know Natalie and I used to date too.”

“Did you date her for *two months*, though?” She asks him, a challenge in her eyes.

He scoffs. “*Three.*”

“My condolences, Natalie.” Danny doesn’t look at her when she says it.

Kirsch smiles when he hears: “It’s fine. Kirsch was a good boyfriend.”

“Yeah, but did he ever win you that huge panda from the carnival?” Danny leans in towards Natalie across the table. They laugh together.
“I still have that in my room, you know.”

“Really?” She taps Natalie’s hand with her knuckle. “You know, we should really hang out some time. I miss that surprisingly heavy guy.”

She nods. “Totally.”

Kirsch steps closer and sets the two drinks down on the table directly in front of Natalie. “Or, or, uh, or we could. We could hang out some time, y’know. Relive some of those great times. Remember the baseball game?”

Natalie smiles and nods between them. “Why don’t we all hang out together?”

Danny laughs so abruptly that it’s almost a howl. (And a totally fake one.) “Please. I spent six hours with him today and I almost killed him twice.”

“Yeah, says the girl who kissed me like two hours into those six hours.” He crosses his arms and wiggles his eyebrows. He can actually see the vein in her forehead start to pulse. Mission accomplished.

“That was on a dare, and frankly, it was disgusting.”

“You two kissed?” Natalie’s mouth hangs open in a confused half-smile.

“What? No.” Danny shakes her head. “It wasn’t a real kiss.”

“Felt real to me.”

“The only thing that feels real is the sheer mortification I feel, knowing that I’ve kissed you.”

He holds his hands up by his sides and shrugs. “I don’t know what that even means, but screw you.”

Danny laughs and stands up to continue laughing in his face. He almost makes a joke about her going in for another kiss but decides against it. No way, too gross.

“Great comeback, real mature.” She gives Natalie a sincere look. “This one’s a winner.”

“You’re gonna regret that, pal.”

“Bring it, tough guy.”

Carmilla wants to ask where the hell Laura got the idea that this is a feel good movie, but she isn’t confident that her voice will come out steady.

There are a million moves she could try to pull if she was really letting herself get invested in this girl, but crying over a fictional fucking character is not one she intends on trying. She locks her jaw and lets out an exasperated sigh. She may not feel apathetic, but she’s sure as hell going to play the part.

The teacher dressed like Barry Manilow pushes Bender into a small room; almost a closet but not quite small enough to really count as one. Carmilla consciously unclenches her jaw and forces herself to breathe.
“That’s the last time, Bender. That’s the last time you ever make me look bad in front of those kids, do you hear me? I make 31,000 dollars a year and I’ve got a home and I’m not about to throw it away on some punk like you. But someday, someday when you’re out of here and you forget all about this place, and they’ve forgotten all about you, and you’re wrapped up in your own pathetic life, I am gonna be here. That’s right. And I’m gonna kick the living shit out of you. I’m gonna knock your dick in the dirt.”

Laura scoffs and cross her arms. “I hate this guy so much.”

Carmilla just nods.

“You threatening me?”

“What are you gonna do about it? You think anybody’s gonna believe you? You think anybody is gonna take your word over mine? I’m a man of respect around here, they love me around here, I’m a swell guy.”

Carmilla ducks her head.

“You’re a lyin’ sack of shit. And everybody knows it.”

Laura shakes her head. “It just makes me so sad, you know? That there are people like that, teachers like that.”

Carmilla clears her throat and steadies her voice. “You know that he has a point, right?”

“What point?”

She shrugs and pulls her foot from the coffee table, resting it on the edge of the couch. Her hands fold over her knee. “Nobody would believe him.”

“I don’t think that’s true.” Laura gets distracted watching the movie for a second before she starts up again. “People believe the victim almost all the time, especially if he’s a minor.”

“People don’t believe victims like him.”

“What do you mean?” She pauses the movie, offended at the lack of justice in this hypothetical.

“His clothes, his hair, his attitude, he isn’t innocent enough to get people’s sympathy.” As an afterthought she adds, “And not against an authority figure. I’m not saying it’s right, I’m just saying...” Carmilla shrugs again. “Nobody would believe him.”

Laura considers this for a moment. “I would believe him.” She unpauses the movie and grabs a handful of popcorn.

_The teacher rips his jacket off. “Get on your feet, pal. Let’s find out how tough you are. I wanna know, right now, how tough you are. C’mon. I’ll give you the first punch. Let’s go. C’mon. Right here.” He points to his chin. “Just take the first shot. Please, I’m beggin’ you, take a shot right here, c’mon! Just take one shot. That’s all I need, just one swing.”_

_The kid, backed completely against the wall and holding his knee to his chest, is speechless._

Carmilla’s stomach turns.

_The teacher fakes a punch and watches him flinch. “That’s what I thought. You’re a gutless turd.”_
“Do you have a bathroom?”

Laura looks up at her and motions towards the basement stairs. “Yeah, it’s upstairs, across from the kitchen, first door on your left.” She pauses the film for her.

“Thanks.”

“Alright, kid, you’ve got this.” LaF feels a pat on their back.

They shake their head and close their eyes for a moment.

Things are starting to get a _little_ dizzy.

But they can totally shake this off. Perry is outside on the lawn on the phone and LaFontaine has a very important game of beer pong to win. Right here. Right now. They fake a couple of tosses to warm up and try to do enough mental physics to know where the ball’s trajectory should be.

(Sidenote: Trajectory is _one hell of a word_. They should use it more.)

They throw the ball down and it bounces off the table, then the rim of a cup, and directly into a blue plastic cup.

LaFontaine throws their arms in the air and fist pumps in the middle of a crowd of cheers. “That! Is how you play this game, gentlemen.” Jake is on the other end of the table and he shrugs before removing the ping pong ball and downing the contents of the blue cup.

One of the guys on the other team grumbles and cocks his head to the right, taking his place at the edge of the very sticky table. He clears his throat and sends the ping pong ball hurling towards the center of the table. It ricochets off several surfaces that it probably shouldn’t have and everyone agrees; that shot didn’t count.

Jake presses into the guy’s arm. “Alright, alright, alright, lemme give it a shot.” He leans down and Laf grins at him.

“You and me, Jacob. You and me.”

“You’re an ass, LaF.” He says before launching the ball across the table. It lands inches from LaFontaine in a purple cup. The boys across from them all clap Jake on the back and he raises his eyebrows. “Drink up, champ. Nothin’ goes to waste.”

LaFontaine tosses back the drink, barely letting the taste hit their tongue. Although they do have to admit, the taste gets better after the first three or four half cups. Which they reason doesn’t actually add up to much. It can’t. The cups are smaller at the base, and they’re only half-full.

And not just in the optimistic way.

(Even though everything is feeling a little on the half-full side right now.)

A very nice boy named Malcolm grabs them by the shoulders and yells some drunken chant before LaFontaine feels another ball being pressed into their hands.

“One more, one more.”

They nod and run a hand through their hair before leaning down to line up their sights with the two
remaining cups of the table. Theoretically, LaFontaine could knock them out with a single toss if they dared to throw two balls at once. Nobody was exactly playing this game by the ru-

“Sweetie? What are you doing?”

They feel a hand on their shoulder and shoot up, hiding the ping pong ball behind their back.

Which, in hindsight, probably should have been the hand they held in front of them, considering the other hand held a cup of beer.

“Perr. Hey. What’s up.”

“C’mon, dude, throw the ball.” Malcolm says.

“Are you playing beer pong?” Perry frowns at the state of the table in front of them. It’s sticky. Very very sticky.

“Not anymore.” They laugh and drop the ball on the table, much to Malcolm’s disappointment.

“How’d your, uh, how’d your phone call..... go? Was it your Mom?” They blink the stars out of their eyes and smile at their very very very beautiful girlfriend. Is she always this pretty? They feel like taking notes.

“Yes, and it went... fine. Are you drunk?” She grips their elbow and pulls them away from the crowd of boys. They stumble, almost tripping over the keg on their way into the foyer. LaFontaine erupts into a fit of giggles but stops when they see the expression on Perry’s face. They frown, trying to pass it off as a series of coughs. “Did you have more than one drink?”

They wince. “I’m sorry.”

Perry gives them The Look. “How many did you have?”

“I’m... not sure.”

“Oh, you’re not sure? LaFontaine.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, shit, I... I know the rule, but your phone call took way longer than I thought and Jake pulled me into this game of beer pong and have you ever played beer pong? It is really fun but you have to drink like, every time they get a ball in your cup. And I made Malcolm take most of the drinks but–” They stop for a minute, trying to get a burp under control. “I started to feel bad and then I just had a couple and a couple turned into.... not a couple and.... I’m sorry. I kind of forgot about the rule.”

Perry nods and rubs their arm. “You know the one drink rule isn’t just me trying to control you or anything. I just don’t like you getting drunk.” They just nod and Perry manages a smile with a squeeze of LaFontaine’s arm. “Your mother is just so horrible at handling her liquor, and I-”

“No, babe, I get it. It’s a good rule.” They blink and can’t help but smile because, really, everything feels kind of amazing. “You look really pretty tonight, you know that?” LaFontaine reaches out and tugs on one of Perry’s curls. “Like, really pretty.”

“Okay, maybe we should find somewhere a little more private to... finish this conversation.”

LaF nods and laces their fingers with Perry’s. Somewhere in the back of their mind they know this is a bad idea. Very bad. Possibly devastatingly bad. But nothing they’re feeling convinces them that anything could be so bad with Perry holding their hand.
“Okay.”

-  

Carmilla steps into the basement a few minutes later with some snarky comment about Laura’s monogrammed bath towels. For the record, they were a gift from Perry. Even her Dad has a set. Carmilla looks more composed than she did before she left so abruptly. Laura already knows that she’d never admit it, but the movie is totally affecting Carmilla.

She adds 'gets quickly invested in fictional characters' to her growing list of things to hold against her one day.

"Okay, just a heads up,” Laura says while tucking her knees underneath her and picking up the remote. "The second half of the movie is a little more emotional. I'm probably gonna cry on you."

Carmilla laughs and drops herself on the couch. "Looking forward to it."

Laura hears Carmilla laugh, really laugh for the first time when Bender falls through the ceiling tiles of the library. He hops down the stairs, delivers the punchline; "Forgot my pencil," and Carmilla almost chokes on her soda.

(Yep, this movie is definitely a success so far.)

Laura can’t help but smile at the way Carmilla is completely captivated by the movie when Allison starts to speak up about her parents.

“My home life is unsatisfying.”

“So, you’re saying you’d subject yourself to the violent dangers of these Chicago streets because your home life is unsatisfying?”

“I don’t have to run away and live in the street, I can run away and I can go to the ocean, I can go to the country, I can go to the mountains, I could go to Israel, Africa, ... Afghanistan.”

Brian turns to Andy. “Andy, you wanna get in on this? Allison here says she wants to run away because her home life is unsatisfying.”

Andy blanks. “Well, everyone’s home life is unsatisfying. If it wasn’t, people would live with their parents forever.”

“Yeah, I understand, but I think hers goes beyond what guys like you and me consider ‘normal’ unsatisfying.”

Allison quickly backtracks. “Nevermind, forget it. Everything’s cool.”

Andy sits up. “What’s the deal?”

“No. There’s no deal, Sporto. Forget it. Leave me alone.”

Carmilla’s hands have stilled. Laura doesn’t remember when she pulled her knees back towards her chest again but it seems to be the position she’s most comfortable with. Her eyes never leave the screen.

(As much as she might claim to like Bender, Laura has a growing theory that Allison is Carmilla’s favorite character.)
Andy follows after her and presses her for more. “So what’s wrong? What is it?” He waits. “Is it bad? ...Real bad? ...Parents?” There’s a pause as the severity of the situation sinks in on him and he turns, leaning against the counter.

Laura notices the tension in Carmilla’s body out of the corner of her eye.

“Yeah.”

Andy nods. “What do they do to you?”

“They ignore me.”

“Yeah.”

The scene shifts to the teacher and the janitor and the shaky breath that Carmilla lets out doesn’t go unnoticed. Laura gives her a small smile which she pretends not to see.

-“You just don’t want her to answer because she’s totally gonna say I’m a better kisser than you are.”

Danny rolls her eyes. She wonders if he’s that full of himself all on his own or if his ego is some kind of male birthright. In her experience, it tends to be the latter. “Or maybe I just don’t want her to answer because I actually respect her privacy. Maybe it would make her uncomfortable.”

Natalie cringes from behind them where she’s still sitting at the table. “Danny’s right, I’m not very-”


“You never respect my privacy.”

This seems to jar him for a moment and he swallows. He looks a little guilty and that’s good, because despite his complete lack of wit, she was starting to lose ground in this argument.

It doesn’t last long.

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about you always harassing me these days.”

“Oh, sorry, did you mean when I actually talked to you for once? Excuse me for trying to make polite conversation.” He raises his arms in surrender and she locks her jaw.

He’s actually trying to piss her off. She sees it in the way he smiles and it’s refreshing, because usually he does it by purely existing. This is new.

Infuriating, but new.

Natalie slides off her chair and offers Danny a polite smile. “Hey, um. I’m gonna go grab another drink and never come back.”

“Bullshit,” Danny jabs at his chest. “What the hell was that heart to heart crap you pulled in the gym?”
“Oh, and I guess it’s a crime to try and make friends now? Sorry, never got the memo.”

“And since when are we friends? Since when have you ever wanted to be friends? You’ve hated me since freshman year, we’ve hated each other since freshman orientation.”

“Yeah, you know why?” He takes a step towards her.

She doesn’t back down and instead leans in too. “Oh this should be stellar.”

“Because you’re a bitch.”

She smiles. “Wow. That’s, yeah that’s a good one. Never heard that one before.” Is this boy for real?

“You know what?” He reaches for the plastic cup on the table and suddenly there’s six feet of boy pressing into her chest for a split second and oh god she can smell his cologne.

(It’s disgusting.)

He takes the cup and steps back. “I’m gonna be the bigger man here.”

“It’s always about size with you boys, isn’t it?”

He doesn’t comment on it but she notices the way his fist clenches around the cup. “I’m taking the high ground.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“I’m gonna walk away.”

“Please do.”

She scoffs and grabs her cup from the tabletop as he walks backwards, his hands raised by his head. She places bets on how many superman poses it’ll take for him to drop that cup. “Walking away, Lawrence. I’m walking aw-” He loses his footing when he backs into a foosball table and the cup goes flying, along with his legs.

She gives him a sarcastic nod and a thumbs up as he scrambles to his feet.

“Walking away!”

- 

“Couldn’t we have just watched Frozen or something?” Carmilla reaches for more popcorn and pouts at the empty bowl. “I was promised a classic. This is a sob fest.”

“It’s not a.... You haven’t even cried once, okay?” She says it as genuinely as she can, this is her one good deed of the day. At least Carmilla can think she’s maintained some kind of reputation.

“There are five teenagers crying in a circle on your television. How is this a feel good movie.” She says it like she isn’t looking for an answer, which is good because Laura doesn’t really have one.

“It cheers up towards the end. Actually right here, okay, watch this.”

Bender turns his attention to Claire. “I wanna see what Claire can do.”

“I can’t do anything.”
“Everybody can do something.”

“There’s one thing I can do.” She changes her mind. “No, forget it, it’s way too embarrassing.”

“You ever seen Wild Kingdom? I mean that guy’s been doing that show for thirty years.”

“Okay. But you have to swear to God you won’t laugh.”

Bender makes the sign of the cross over his chest.

“Okay.” Claire pulls a tube of lipstick from her purse and uncaps it. “I can’t believe I’m actually doing this.” She wedges it in her bra and shakes her hair before leaning over. Ten seconds later, she pulls her head up, a line of lipstick expertly applied on her upper lip.

Laura pauses the movie.

Carmilla frowns at her. “What are you doing?”

“Okay, don’t laugh.” She chews on her lip for a moment. “But I can do that thing with the lipstick.”

“Why am I not surprised?” Carmilla hides a smile. “If that’s supposed to impress me, I have some bad news for you.”

“Hey, it’s not as easy as it looks. The lipstick falls out like half the time.”

“Sounds challenging.”

“If it’s so easy, how come you can’t do it?”

“What makes you think I can’t?”

“Well, can you?”

“No.”

Laura narrows her eyes and Carmilla offers her a cocky smile. She’s doing this on purpose.

“You frustrate me.”

“You amuse me.”

“How?”

“That bunched up little face you make when you’re angry is hilarious, buttercup.”

“One, I’m not angry. And two, I think it’s gonna be hilarious when you try to pull that trick off and can’t do it.”

“And what makes you think I’ll even try?”

“Well, you said it yourself, it can’t be that hard, right?”

“Doesn’t mean I’m gonna do it. There’s lots of things that aren’t hard that you’ve never done.”

Laura scoffs. “Name one.”

“Well for starters, it’s not hard to kiss a girl.”
Laura breaks eye contact and laughs, wiping her palms on her jeans. “What do you mean, I kissed Danny in the library like six hours ago. You were there.”

Carmilla smiles like she knows something Laura doesn’t. She pushes herself up on the armrest and tucks her feet underneath her. “Laura. I hate to be the one to break this to you, but you deserve the truth.” Laura swallows when Carmilla puts a hand on her knee. “That thing in the library was not a kiss.”

“Fine. So maybe I’ve never kissed a girl. Maybe I just haven’t had the...” Carmilla moves her hand away and leans back against the armrest. “…Opportunity to.”

The movie is still playing in the background.

“But! You totally have the opportunity to prove yourself on this one. I’ll grab the lipstick.” She jets out of the room and bolts up the stairs, past her very confused father in the living room, to her bathroom. Laura rifles through her drawers to find an unopened stick labeled “AVON: Totally Kissable”. She isn’t entirely sure how Carmilla feels about germs. Better not risk it.

When she shuts the basement door behind her and makes her way down the stairs, Carmilla is pretending to be asleep.

(She knows this because nobody ever looks that good when they’re asleep.)

“I got this one the other day, I haven’t used it yet.”

Carmilla opens one eye and then the other. “You know, pink isn’t really my color.”

“Yeah, yeah, shut up. You’re not leaving this house until you embarrass yourself and admit it’s totally impressive that I can do this.” Laura sits down in front of Carmilla, who is trying to sit up in the most disinterested way possible. She waves the lipstick in front of her.

“If you insist.” Carmilla takes the stick from her, frowning at the label.

(This shade is named Lovey Dovey.)

She makes a show of sighing before she tugs at her t-shirt, revealing much more cleavage than it does in it’s normal position. “Like this?” She slips the lipstick in it’s place.

“Uh. Yeah, just.” Laura reaches out. “May I?”

“Be my guest.”

Laura lets out a soft laugh and takes control of the lipstick, guiding it to the right spot. She tries to be clinical about it because this is probably not the position she should be in with her new friend, especially one that had come out to her hours ago.

Not that her sexuality matters, it doesn’t. It’s just different. Laura had taught LaF how to do this trick but that was completely different. They weren’t interested in her.

Not that Carmilla is. Or could ever be. She’s just single, so it’s different.

Is she single?

Moot point, Laura decides with a shake of her head. They’re friends and she’s not sure why she’s even thinking about this.
She finds the right spot, the end of the lipstick fits itself in the junction of Carmilla’s bra, pressed against her skin.

“There, that should be... sturdy.” Laura looks up and notices two things immediately. The first being that Carmilla looks a little flustered. She shouldn’t be proud of this, but a very small part of her is.

(A very small part that happens to be a very large part.)

The second is that she can spot the tiny red veins that cover the skin underneath her eyes, which probably mean that she needs to get a good night’s sleep. This is what alerts Laura to the fact that she is way too close.

(Which explains why she’s officially rambling to herself.

And it also kind of explains the whole flustered thing.

Which she is totally not proud of.)

“Okay, go for it.”

Carmilla clears her throat and holds her hair back

And applies her lipstick.

Perfectly.

“Have you done this before?”

Carmilla pulls the lipstick from her shirt and applies the rest to her bottom lip. She presses her lips together and Laura finds herself subconsciously licking her own.

“I might have.”

“You said you’ve never seen this movie!”

She shrugs. “I haven’t, but I guess the girl who taught me how to do this had.”

“You knew how to do that the whole time?”

“Yes.”

“But you made me help you put the lipstick in your-”

“I did.”

“Have I mentioned you frustrate me?”

“Have I mentioned the cute face you make when you’re frustrated?”

Laura picks up the remote roughly, still upset about being deprived of seeing Carmilla embarrass herself.

(Shes deserved it, that girl is too good at everything.)

“Don’t think this means I’m not gonna make you finish this movie. We missed like half the ending.”

Carmilla sinks into the couch again. “God forbid I get that lucky.”
Somewhere between the foyer and the stairs, they fall through a door together. Perry frowns and furrows her eyebrows because this is the third time they’ve tripped over something now (the most recent victim: a roll of toilet paper).

LaFontaine doesn’t seem to have a grasp on how drunk they are and Perry feels her heart ache. She’s seen this exact behaviour from their mother. Their mother, who hides wine bottles behind the microwave and tosses insults at inanimate objects. Their mother, who drinks until she forgets that she’s a married woman who should really not be inviting so many men over because not only is it unfaithful, but the perfect picture of hypocrisy.

LaF smiles at Perry as the door shuts behind them and kicks the roll of toilet paper underneath the bathroom sink. “Okay, believe it or not that wasn’t me being drunk, that was just me being a clumsy idiot.”

She nods. “Oh, trust me. I believe it.” Perry locks the door as an afterthought and ignores the way LaFontaine raises an eyebrow.

Or tries to, anyway. They think they’re only raising one eyebrow but they’re drunk and clearly not remembering that this is a skill they can only master with serious concentration.

Both eyebrows are raised, and they just look surprised.

She doesn’t feel like explaining why she locked the door so she just defaults to, “You’re drunk.”

“I will agree, I’m not sober.” LaFontaine holds up a finger to illustrate something but drops it. “But I don’t think I’m drunk. Just... buzzed.”

Perry crosses her arms and purses her lips.

“Okay. I see you’re worrying. I know the worry face. You’re making the worry face.” They tug at her crossed arms, pulling them apart and rubbing up the sides.

“I have good reason to be worried and you know it.”

They soften at that. “Perr, it’s not like that. I’m not like that.”

“You could be. You know that you could be.”

“I won’t be. I’m not gonna turn into some alcoholic.” LaFontaine strokes the side of her arm, trailing a path along her sweater to her skin. Their right hand meets her left and she nods.

There’s a moment of complete silence before she closes her eyes and says, “You know that’s not what I’m worried about.”

Their mouth falls open and their eyes drop to the ground between them. Perry feels a pull on her heart and her free hand moves to cup LaFontaine’s cheek. “I’m sorry.”

It’s not something they talk about. There was never an agreement, but she knows. They don’t talk about it.

LaFontaine shakes their head and meets her eyes again. Their cheeks are red, and it’s not from the alcohol. “I’m not gonna become an alcoholic. I’m not my Mom.”

“I know you’re not.” She nods.
“I’m just a little buzzed.” They shrug and manage a smile. It’s so cute that Perry almost feels like nothing could ever be wrong again, for just a moment. “C’mon, I’m fun when I’m buzzed.” They try to shift backwards, pulling Perry closer to them, but slip on the bathmat. Perry almost falls down with them until they grab the shower curtain, giving them purchase for just long enough to keep their balance.

So that’s four stumbles.

“You’re clumsy when you’re buzzed.” Perry says with a laugh.

LaFontaine shakes their head. “No, I have bad depth perception when I’m buzzed. It’s the... alcohol, it interferes with the brain’s information processing skills.” They get distracted by a piece of lint on Perry’s shoulder for a moment. “It renders low levels of concentration and unawareness of the local environment.”

(They’re really giving it their all on the big words.)

“You’re cute when you’re buzzed.”

LaFontaine looks offended at this. “I’m always cute, buzzed or no buzzed.” They straighten their jean vest and stand a little taller.

“Do you know that we’ve said the word ‘buzzed’ eight times now?”

“That makes nine.” They smile and slip their hand behind Perry’s neck. “You’re right, though. Too much talking. Not enough kissing.”

The way that their lips meet is almost instinct now, but in some ways it still feels like the first time. Except it’s not freshman year anymore and LaFontaine doesn’t have to bite their lip and ask her for permission to kiss her, and she doesn’t have to hold their hand and part their lips, both of them a bundle of nerves. Perry knows exactly where to put her hands, and what to do with her tongue, and she knows just how long they can actually kiss for without one of them breaking into a smile. (Not long.)

They’ve developed habits now, like the way Perry’s hands almost immediately move to run her fingers through LaFontaine’s hair and scratch at the base of their neck. She feels the cold press of a wall (or maybe it’s a door) into her back and there’s that smile because LaFontaine might be small, but they aren’t weak, and somehow they always seem to get into this position around walls or doors or floors or beds.

Their lips trail kisses down her neck and Perry manages to get out a sentence, albeit shakily, because LaFontaine knows she has a weakness for that spot on her neck. “We’re in a stranger’s house.”

They grin and kiss her cheek, and then her jaw, and then the corner of her mouth, and then her lips. “It’s kinda hot, right?”

Perry bites her lip and presses a kiss to LaFontaine’s bottom lip before meeting their eyes. “Anyone could walk in.”

“Didn’t you lock the door?” They stroke the side of her face, not getting much more than a handful of curls. Her hair had decided to be particularly uncooperative this morning.

“Yes.”
“Then kiss me.”

Some old habits die hard. These are the moments LaFontaine still asks for permission, but Perry isn’t nervous or scared. She’s in love, and they taste like beer and potato chips, but it’s nowhere near as overpowering as the taste of love and nowhere near as overpowering as the feeling of home.

-They continue to watch the movie in a comfortable silence. Laura insists on running it back to the beginning of this scene and Carmilla complains but lets her. Some time between Andy’s speech and Brian’s confession, Carmilla throws a pillow on the couch cushion between them and lays down on it, throwing her legs over the armrest. Her bangs now cover her face from this angle and it’s only when she can’t see her anymore that Laura realizes how much she’s been staring at Carmilla.

“You know what I got for Christmas this year? It was a banner fuckin’ year at the old Bender family. I got a carton of cigarettes. The old man grabbed me and said ‘Hey, smoke up, Johnny!’ Okay so go home and cry to your Daddy, don’t cry here, okay?”

Andy is the one to break the silence. “My God, are we gonna be like our parents?”

“Not me.” Claire says. “Ever.”

“It’s unavoidable.” Allison speaks up. “Just happens.”

“What happens?”

“When you grow up... your heart dies.”

“That’s bullshit.” Carmilla picks at a thread where her jeans are ripped at the knees. She makes no indication that she said a word.

“You think so?”

“Everybody has a choice. If your Dad was an asshole, you wouldn’t choose to be like him, right?”

“Right.” Laura drums her fingers against the armrest. “But I kind of hope I’m like my mom one day.”

“What’s wrong with your Dad?”

“Nothing, he’s great. There was just... something about her, you know?” She sighs. “You know sometimes I wonder if I even knew her, really. People change so much. I only knew her for ten years. Kirsch’s dad up and left when he was eight. Danny used to have a great relationship with her mom, and LaFontaine... I just wonder sometimes what would have happened to us.” Carmilla adjusts her head so she can look up at Laura but Laura doesn’t meet her eyes. “It’s like I have this glorified image of her and I know she wasn’t perfect, but she felt like it to me.”

Carmilla nods. “Maybe she was.”

She wipes at her eyes before the tears can really form. “Sorry. Bit heavy for a movie night.”

“Hate to break it to you, cupcake. You picked a pretty heavy movie.”

Laura laughs. “Yeah, I’d like to formally apologize for forgetting how emotional this movie is. I’m gonna have to introduce you to Mean Girls or something next time. I mean, if you want... a next time.”
Carmilla doesn’t comment on that last part, choosing to completely turn Laura’s world upside down in a single sentence instead. “I’ve seen Mean Girls.”

“You’ve seen Mean Girls.”

“I don’t live under a rock.”

“Sorry, I just-” She shakes her head in disbelief and Carmilla sits up on her elbows to face her. “When I look at you, I think a lot of things but ‘This is a girl who has seen Mean Girls’ has never been on the list.”

“Then what is on the list?”

“Nothing, it was just an expression.”

“I’m sure.” She lays back down with a smug look on her face. “You know, we’re doing it again.”

“Doing what?”

“Missing the ending.”

“Don’t worry.” Laura shrugs. “We’ll catch it when we rewatch it with the DVD commentary on.”

Carmilla just sinks into couch again with an eye roll, accepting defeat.

(Laura wonders if Carmilla knows just how obvious it is that she’s enjoying herself. It would probably horrify her.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
Laura has always been a front of the bus kind of girl. It’s easy, convenient and not to mention that Mr. Samuel - their bus driver - actually has some fairly entertaining stories about the time he spent living in Poland when he was a child. It used to be the perfect set-up for a comfortable ride to school until it was brought to her attention that not everyone sees the appeal of upper bus seating.

(And by ‘everyone’ she not-so-secretly means Carmilla.)

On Monday morning, Laura waves at Carmilla from the bus window as she watches her approach the bus. She has her earphones in and Will is trailing about 6 feet behind her.

(Laura doesn’t understand why they are so adamant about not being associated with each other. If she had a sibling she would probably make sure they were the best of friends.)

She smiles at Carmilla as she gets on the bus, moving her bag so that she’ll have somewhere to sit. This is all done in vain because Carmilla walks past her without a bat of her eyes.

On Tuesday, Laura makes sure the seat next to her is already empty so there is no confusion on Carmilla’s end when she gets on the bus. Apparently this is not clear enough because all Laura gets is a slightly raised hand in greeting as Carmilla plows towards the back of the bus.

By Wednesday, Laura has a better plan of action. She sits exactly six seats behind her usual spot and waits for Carmilla to show up. It’s not the back of the bus, but it is certainly a long stretch from the front. It’s the perfect compromise.

(Obviously it is not perfect enough, because Carmilla gets on the bus and with a quick hey and a smile she walks to the very end.)

On Thursday morning Laura wakes up determined to sit next to Carmilla. Or at the very least near her.

(Shes’s not completely unreasonable.)

She frowns as she waits for the bus to get to Carmilla’s stop. After the night they had last weekend she was hoping that maybe they would get to spend more time together this week, but with only one shared class and Carmilla’s obvious dedication to sitting at the back of the bus, they haven’t had the
chance.

They pull up to Carmilla’s stop and Laura sits up a bit straighter. She makes sure to wave at Carmilla from the window and takes the smile she receives as a good sign.

Carmilla walks on the bus and Laura motions towards the seat beside her. She chose a seat almost near the back of the bus today and if Carmilla does not take this offer she vows to give up on the whole operation.

(Okay, maybe not, but she needs something to motivate her to succeed today.)

Carmilla finally takes a hint and pulls out one of her earbuds, “Morning, cutie.”

“Good morning,” Laura smiles and motions to the seat beside her, “Wanna sit?”

Carmilla glances towards the back of the bus and before she has a chance Laura pulls her down. Carmilla raises her eyebrows and Laura winces, “Uh, sorry. The bus was about to start and I didn’t want you to fall down and hurt yourself.”

Carmilla doesn’t look convinced but before Laura has a chance to ask her about her week, Carmilla puts the earbud in and stares at the front of the bus the entire time. When they arrive, there’s barely enough time for Carmilla to say *bye, cupcake* before she’s rushing off to class.

(Laura quickly realizes that sitting adjacent to each other just won’t do.)

Once Friday rolls around, Laura takes desperate action. She sits as far back as possible without being at the *absolute* back - she refuses to be the only one making compromises in this arrangement - and pulls out her phone.

Laura (7:43am): *I made cookies last night. Did you want some?*

Carmilla (7:48am): *Well, I’ve never been known for turning down free treats from pretty girls.*

Laura’s grin stretches across her face. This is perfect. It’s not like they could share cookies from across the aisle, so Carmilla will *have* to sit with her. It’s the only logical explanation.

(Laura doesn’t allow herself to entertain the notion that Carmilla would grab the cookies and leave her in the dust because that would just be *rude.*)

When Carmilla gets on the bus, Laura waves to her and Carmilla looks like she is trying not to smile. There are no earphones today, which is a great sign.

“Hey,” Carmilla plops in the seat next to her, “So, where are said promised treats?”

“*Good morning* to you, too,” she pauses for dramatic effect but rolls her eyes as she pulls out a tiny container, “Here you go. I hope you like gingerbread.”

She shrugs, “Chocolate chip is better, but these will do.”

Laura fidgets with her bag as Carmilla takes a few bites and stares at her, “Aren’t you having any?”

“What? No, I made those for you,” Carmilla raises an eyebrow, “I mean - not *made* for you, but I brought them for you. I already had a bunch this morning at breakfast.”

(Okay, so that’s a lie. But she’s not necessarily at the stage of friendship with Carmilla to show her how messy of an eater she is.)
Carmilla nods and Laura continues, “You know, if you like chocolate chip, I could maybe bring those in on Monday,” she toys with her bracelet, “Like, if you want.”

“You know,” Carmilla wipes her mouth with the back of her hand before leaning in close, “If you wanted me to sit with you, all you had to do was ask.”

She bites her lip and smiles, “Yeah?”

“Yes, sweetheart. Next time? Just use your words.”

She laughs and nods, mumbling out an okay as she settles in and feels an unfamiliar warmth in her chest.

(For someone who talks so much, why didn’t she just think of that?)

-----

“Sweetie, can you pass me the shovel?”

She pats the soil around the freshly planted flower and wipes some sweat from her brow, “Honey?”

“Babe, check it out,” she looks over and LaFontaine has created some sort of unidentifiable creature out of the dirt, “It’s Frosty the Soilman.”

She purses her lips and rolls her eyes, “When you agreed to help me garden I thought you actually meant it.”

They smile bashfully, “Uh, sorry. Yes, totally helping.” They crawl over with a shovel and kneel beside her, “To be fair, I thought that gardening was code for making out.”

“LaFontaine.”

Perry grabs the shovel but smiles to herself when her face is out of LaFontaine’s view. It’s very hard to pretend to be mad at them when they’re giving her that smile. She sometimes thinks LaFontaine practices it in the mirror until they’re confident that they’ve reached optimum charming capabilities.

“Perr, I’m going to be honest: I have no idea what I’m doing.”

She turns to them and grins, “You? Not knowing something? I think I might need to lie down and process this shocking information.”

LaFontaine playfully scowls at her, “Botany is not my area of expertise. That’s why I have you.” They lean forward until they’re an inch from Perry’s face and then pause midway, eyes wide, “Woah, sorry. Force of habit.”

“You need to keep your habits under control, honey.”

They mutter out a shut up before grabbing a small handful of soil and throwing it her way.

(Oh no. They did not just do that.)

“Sweetie, if you value our relationship at all you will never do that again.”

“Oh?” LaFontaine makes a show of staring her down while slowly grabbing an even bigger fistful of soil, “So, if I were to do this,” they pour the dirt over Perry’s lap, “What would happen?”
“LaFontaine.” She gives them the look that she knows has the power to put the fear of God into whole armies. It seems to slightly do the trick if their subtle gulp is any indication, but they hold their ground. Apparently LaFontaine is feeling particularly determined to test her today.

(They have no idea who they are up against.)

LaFontaine grabs another handful, “Mhm?”

She raises her eyebrow, reaching down to grab the shovel and digging it into the dirt, scooping up a large pile, “I am not against throwing this all over you.”

They scoff and grin, “You wouldn-”

The look of pure shock is just enough to make Perry burst into a fit of giggles.

“I can’t believe you poured that all over my head.”

Bits of soil fall from their mouth as they speak and it spurs another round of laughter from Perry, her side starting to hurt, “Your face,” she grabs her ribs, “I wish you could see your face.”

They huff out and she sees the split-second decision in their eyes before they launch forward to grab the shovel. Perry is two steps ahead of them - as always - and is quick to swipe at their hands before they can reach it, instead lacing their fingers together and falling into a makeshift wrestling hold.

They struggle with each other’s hands, bursts of laughter popping out in between looks of sheer determination, when Perry realizes just how close they are.

It feels like they’re suspended in space and Perry is suddenly hit with how beautiful they look.

(There’s something about LaFontaine covered in dirt, hair slightly mussed and still able to manage a grin that could cure cancer that reminds Perry why she’s the luckiest girl in the world.)

It’s suddenly quiet and they stare straight into her eyes, whispering out, “I love you.”

Her breath catches before she leans back a bit and looks at them curiously, “What was that for?”

They shrug and dip a finger into the dirt, wiping it on the tip of her nose, “Just because.”

The way they say things so bluntly - holding so much purity and honesty that there’s no way Perry could doubt it - sends a kaleidoscope of butterflies fluttering in her chest.

(They wishes she could capture these moments in a jar like fire flies so the glowing light can shine in times of darkness.)

The moment is interrupted by the sound of yelling filtering out through the window above the garden bed that is cracked open an inch.

She avoids LaFontaine’s questioning eyes by glancing towards the window and sighs, gently untangling their hands. It’s been like this for weeks. Her dad shows up with more contracts to discuss, and instead of having civil discussion like adults they turn into argumentative children all over again. Perry hoped this kind of thing would end with their divorce five years ago, but it looks like that was too much to wish for.

She clears her throat, “Um, we should really get back to planting before brunch starts.”

LaFontaine nods and offers a smile, “Of course. Just tell me what to do, boss.”
She tries not to grin at the nickname but it’s easy enough when she can hear the yelling continue.

“If she is living under my roof - whether she’s 18 or not - then there are still expenses to cover!”

She sucks in a deep breath and passes them a shovel, “So, just dig a small hole about four inches apart from each other,” she makes a new one to demonstrate, “Like this.”

“Okay, sounds easy enough.”

“And if she goes away to school? You’re crazy if you think I’ll still give you a dime of my money.”

LaFontaine looks at her with a face bombarded with worry and concern, but she ignores it.

(Perry wonders if that is what her own resting face looks like.)

“It’s the law, Vince. Or are you so full of yourself that you think you’ve above the law, too?”

“So, did you hear about Mr. Di Stefano?”

“Perr-”

“I can’t believe he was caught drinking on school property.”

LaFontaine sighs, “Listen, Perry-”

“You know, what’s even more shocking is that he only received a suspension. Can you believe that? I’m just glad he only teaches the freshman because I would hate to have to be taught by a drunk.”

LaFontaine doesn’t get a chance to respond because a new wave of yelling has begun. Which is completely fine because gardening really should be done in silence, anyway. There is a lot to think about, like the diameter of the area and how deep to make the hole and making sure enough soil covers the roots. Perry focuses on the feel of the soil underneath her fingers and not the shouts coming from inside.

Which is not that difficult when there is just so much going on with the gardening in front of her. She also has to keep an eye on LaFontaine to make sure they’re planting properly because it would just be irresponsible of her not to check.

(Honestly, there’s almost no time to worry about the sounds of the deterioration of her family coming from the inside of home.)

The harsh sound of the screen door garners both of their attention, Perry’s mom standing on the back porch, “Girls, are you ready to come in to eat?”

LaFontaine stills and Perry reaches over to put a supportive hand on the bottom of their back.

“Yeah, mom. We’ll get cleaned up and come right inside.”

Her mom nods, “Great. Your father is going to join us for brunch since we haven’t spent that much time together as a family lately.”

She tries to force a smile, “Sounds good.”

Her mom heads back inside and Perry offers LaFontaine an apologetic smile, “I’m sorry.”

They roll their eyes and smile, “You’re not the one who said it. Plus, she doesn’t know.”
She shrugs, “I know. But still.”

LaFontaine smiles wider, “Have I mentioned how cute you are when you’re worried?”

“Maybe about once every three hours,” she looks down, “I don’t really know what they’re trying to achieve with these random family brunches. They hate each other enough and it’s bad enough to subject me to it, but to do it while you’re here? It’s so unnecessary.”

LaFontaine shrugs, “They’re trying,” Perry gives them a look, “Well...kind of.”

Perry sighs and LaFontaine reaches forward to place a hand over hers, “Let’s just go get cleaned up and face it together, okay?”

She smiles and nods, “Okay.” She takes another proper look at them, “I think you need a shower.”

“I think I need a full-body quarantine. This stuff is going to be stuck in my ears for days.”

She laughs as LaFontaine stands up and dramatically shakes their body to get the residual soil off. They walk back towards the house and she takes in a deep breath before crossing the threshold. (Things aren’t exactly ideal, but at least she doesn’t have to face them alone.)

-----

Selina claws at the bottom of his pants, “Sorry buddy, I’m really trying to finish this Algebra homework.”

She meows at him and rubs against his legs, “I know, I know - I shouldn’t have left it until Sunday, but here we are.”

He tries to focus on the page in front of him but it’s really hard. There are so many numbers in the middle of questions that make absolutely no sense to him. He doesn’t understand why math has to be so complicated. Sometimes he wishes he could get extra credit for knowing about math history, because that’s something he could ace for sure.

He finishes three questions when Selina jumps onto his lap, “You’re right. I think I deserve a break.”

He picks her up and collapses onto his bed, checking his email and sighing. He sends a quick text.

**Kirsch (1:09pm):** yo

He opens up NFL’s homepage and checks to see if he’s gotten any points for his fantasy team yet. As expected, not that much yet, but he doesn’t have that many guys playing the one o’clock games so it’s not too bad. He just hopes his players deliver this week because Sam is the worst gloat when he wins this kind of stuff. He goes to check the scores of the teams playing right now and glances over at his unfinished homework; he really hopes he can finish it by tonight so he can watch the Texans game.

Selina purrs into his chest when his phone buzzes and he switches apps to check the message.

**Summer Psycho (1:15pm):** Hey.

**Kirsch (1:15pm):** have u checked ur email

**Summer Psycho (1:16pm):** I’m out right now.
Kirsch (1:17pm): we have 2 team up

Kirsch (1:17pm): for zeta and summer society stuff

Summer Psycho (1:19pm): Fuck. I just checked. Ugh, is there any way around this?

Kirsch (1:20pm): not unless u wanna step down from the summer psychos

Kirsch (1:20pm): *psychoes

Kirsch (1:20pm): **psychos??

Kirsch (1:21pm): whatever

Summer Psycho (1:24pm): This is going to be a nightmare.

Kirsch (1:25pm): ur telling me

Summer Psycho (1:27pm): Let’s just meet after school on Tuesday. I’ve got stuff to do tomorrow. Does that work?

Kirsch (1:28pm): ya

He doesn’t bother to check her reply - he already knows it’s going to be some sort of sarcastic remark. He sighs as he sits up and goes back to his desk, another 35 questions left to finish.

(Life would be a lot easier if Selina could just do this for him.)

-----

“Okay, as far as awkward Sunday brunches go, that wasn’t too bad.”

Perry closes the door behind her and goes immediately to her bed, sitting at the head and pulling her knees up to her chest, “You’ve always been a terrible liar.”

They wince, “No, no. It was... interesting?”

Perry folds in on herself and frowns, resting her head on the top of her knees, “I’m sorry you had to sit through that. They just have no tact.”

LaFontaine shrugs and offers her a smile, walking to the bed and sitting next to her, “I’ve listened to a lot worse.” They scoot closer and nudge her with their shoulder, “Remember when Danny went off on that sexist college guy at the 4th of July party? Now that was an argument.”

They’re about to continue when Perry starts wiping at her eyes, a few sniffles accompanying her movements.

“Babe, babe - no, come on,” they wrap their arms around her and wipe at her cheek, “This is only temporary.”

Perry leans into them, “It just feels like my fault. It’s always some sort of argument about me and my future. And I know it gets to my mom, she’s so stressed all the time.”

They sigh, squeezing extra tight and pressing a kiss to her temple, “She can handle herself. They’re both adults.”
She scoffs, “They sure as hell don’t act like it.”

LaFontaine smiles into Perry’s hair, “This is very true.” They run their fingers through Perry’s hair, “You know it’s not up to you to fix their problems, right?”

She melts into LaFontaine’s touch, settling in against their chest. They lie in silence and they wait for her to continue, knowing that she is considering what to say next.

(Perry thinks way too much.)

“It’s just,” she pauses, sighing out, “It doesn’t feel that way. Sometimes it feels like they look to me to solve their problems.” She squeezes her arms tighter around them, burrowing her head farther into their chest, her voice barely a whisper, “I just wish I didn’t have to be everyone’s rock all the time.”

They frown and rub a hand up her arm, letting Perry calm down with the slow rise and fall of their chest. After a few moments they lean down and press a kiss to Perry’s nose, “Well, I’ll be your rock when the rest of the world are assholes.”

This garners a laugh out of her and they’ll take it as a victory. Perry looks up and gives them a sweet kiss, “I don’t know how that still managed to sound romantic, but kudos to you.”

“Hey, you know me: ultimate romantic extraordinaire.”

She giggles and reaches up to wipe one last tear, “I’ll tell you one thing: when I have kids I am never treating them like this.”

“You mean when we have kids.”

Her cheeks pink and LaFontaine’s heart quickens at the sight of it. No matter how many times they have these discussions it always seems to have such an effect on her; LaFontaine finds it very adorable.

“Do you think it’s crazy of us to talk about things like this?”

They shrug, “Statistically, the chances we’ll stay together up to that point are very slim.”

Perry pulls back with raised eyebrows and wide eyes. They shake their head quickly, “No, no - I didn’t” they sigh, “I just brought it up because it’s kind of cool. Because it just means we would be the rare exception. And if that doesn’t scream fairy tale I don’t know what does.”

“Nice save,” she settles back against their chest, “I hope you know we will be getting married long before any children come along.”

“Duh. We’d be married at least three years before any kids happen.”

They can feel Perry smiling wide, “So you’ve thought about this in detail before?”

They shrug, “I may have thought about it once or twice.”

(It would be an autumn ceremony. LaFontaine always thought the leaves match perfectly with the vibrant colour of Perry’s hair.

Perry would wear a vintage dress with lace long sleeves. Her hair would be up in a loose bun, soft curls framing her face in the kind of flawless natural beauty LaFontaine loves the most. They would most likely wear dress pants and a nice vest, a bright bow tie to match the colour of Perry’s bouquet.
They’ll both be in all white and Perry will make a joke about how she’ll always be able to wear white on her wedding day because she’ll be at the point where she stops apologizing for who she is.

They’ll kiss long before the officiator gives them permission to, but no one will be surprised.

Perry will out-dance everyone at the ceremony and they’ll spend the night surrounded by the people they love.)

Perry hums against their collarbone, “Once or twice, huh?”

“Yeah,” they close their eyes, the sight of Perry in a white dress enough to almost stop their heart, “Maybe.”

“You’ll have to tell me about it one day.”

They smile, “I’ll do you one better: I’ll show you.”

(It’s not perfect but to LaFontaine it’s the stuff of fairytales.)

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Mr. Beckett dismisses the class and Laura sighs as she packs up her things.

“What’s this? Is that an actual frown I see on Little Miss Sunshine’s face?”

She looks up and Carmilla is leaning on the desk beside her, arms crossed and grin wide. She rolls her eyes, “I’m not cheery all the time, you know.”

“Huh,” Carmilla shrugs, “Coulda fooled me.”

Laura smiles sadly and goes to walk off but Carmilla is quick to match her step, “So what’s wrong?”

She can feel a tiny smile but tries to hide it from Carmilla, “The quiz we have on the 23rd is the same day as my Algebra unit test. I know that it’s a week from today but,” she sighs, “I don’t know, I’ve just never been good with numbers.”

“I know.” Laura looks to her in confusion and Carmilla makes a face, “What?” She exudes indifference, “I listen sometimes.”

Laura lets out a laugh as she quickly stops to pick something up at her locker. Carmilla leans against the one next to her and continues, “You know, I’m in Pre-Calculus.”

“If you’re going to brag about how smart you are, I don’t really need to hear it today.”

"What I was going to say is I needed to take Algebra as a prerequisite for calc. So, if you need any help or anything-”

Laura launches herself at Carmilla, throwing her arms around her neck, “Oh my God! That would be great,” she pulls back and Carmilla is looking at her with a raised eyebrow. She winces and pulls back, “Sorry. But I’m a hugger,” she tucks a piece of hair behind her ear, “That really is great, though. If you don’t mind.”

“I’m the one who offered, cupcake.”

“Right! Right,” she buzzes with excitement, “Okay, so how about tonight?”
“Um, I thought maybe at lunch or something-”

“Sometimes I have band stuff to do at lunch, and plus after school there’s more time and less people around to distract us,” she sucks in a deep breath, “So I’ll just see you at my place tonight?”

“I-” Carmilla sighs, “I’ll see you at 6.”

Laura bites her lip and grins, practically bouncing on the balls of her feet, “Thanks! Again. Just - okay, I’ve gotta go to band.” She walks away and then turns on her heel, “But I’ll see you tonight?”

Carmilla melts into the locker and blows out a breath, “At 6.”

She nods, “At 6.”

“Okay.”

“Alright.”

“Cutie?”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t you have band?”

Her eyes widen, “Right! I’m - okay, I’m leaving for real now.”

She’s a few steps away when she startles, “Oh!” she turns her head, “Bye!”

Carmilla paints on a smile and twirls her fingers in Laura’s direction.

(It’s funny how things can turn around so quickly.)

-----

"Danny, love, what about this?"

She looks over at the rack her mom is hovering around, a short dress held up against her body, "Doesn't really look your style, Mom."

Her mom looks at her and smiles wide, "Not for me, silly - for you."

Of course. This is what the past 45 minutes looked like. A store Danny doesn't shop in. Outfits she'll never wear. The look of disappointment on her mother's face. Rinse. Repeat.

"I don't know why you keep suggesting things that you know I would never be caught dead wearing."

Her mother sighs, "Can't a mother dream?"

She tries not to roll her eyes too hard. In hindsight, maybe she should have just taken the ride Kirsch offered her after school, but that would have meant spending hours at his house before going to work on their planning.

(It's a testament to her mother's character to know that Danny actually considered it.)

"What about this, honey?"
She doesn't even look up, instead deciding to pull out her phone and shoot a quick text to Kirsch.

"We should really get going. I've gotta meet that guy for the Summer Society thing."

When she looks up her mother's eyes are lit up, "So, tell me all about this boy."

"Mom."

"Oh, come on! Let your mother live a little." Her mom puts the clothes down and walks to Danny, hooking their arms together as they leave the store, "Is he cute?"

She scoffs, "Hardly."

A glance in her mother's direction shows the smallest smile at the corner of her mouth, telling her she doesn't believe that at all.

(Whether Danny thinks Kirsch is cute or not, she would never admit it to her mother.)

"So," her mom trails off and Danny looks down at her before she continues, "Is he single?"

Danny gently breaks free from their linked arms and turns to her, "You know it’s funny because you never ask if any of my female friends are cute. Or whether or not they’re single."

Her mom tuts at her, "Danny, stop being so difficult." Danny sighs and shoves her hands into her pockets as her mother continues, "Is he available or not?"

"He’s gay."

Her eyes widen and she hopes her mom doesn’t catch the perplexed look on her face because that wasn’t supposed to be her answer.

"Oh," her mom stills just enough for Danny to notice before picking up her step, "How brave of him. I'm sure it must be difficult.” Danny huffs and her mother looks at her, “What?”

“You do realize that we’re both queer, right? I’ve never heard much about me being brave in that regard.”

(Okay, so Kirsch isn’t actually gay. But that’s besides the point.)

Her mother laughs, “Sweetheart, you’re different. At least he’s sure about what he wants.”

The blood rushes to her ears, her fists clenching in her pockets. She looks towards the mall doors to avoid her mom seeing the tears pricking the corners of her eyes. They walk the rest of the way in silence and Danny decides she should probably send Kirsch another warning.

(The idea of spending hours at Kirsch's suddenly doesn't sound so bad after all.)

-----

“So when do I have the displeasure of seeing your ugly face.”

Kirsch tries to keep a straight face as he stares at Sarah over the laptop screen.

“You realize that while on Skype you can see my face right now, right?”

He feels his face heat up, “I meant - well, obviously I can see you now, but in person you fucking-”
Her laughter cuts him off, and even though he wishes he could wipe that shit-eating grin off of her face, he has to admit that he misses the sound.

Except he will never admit that to her - not anytime soon, anyway. Sarah is already cocky enough, the last thing she needs is to realize that he actually likes her. He tries to allude as much nonchalance as possible but the way she keeps grinning at him through laughter proves that it’s useless. He sighs, “Seriously, dude - when are you coming home to visit?”

She smiles, a little less teasing this time, “Miss me already, dear brother of mine?”

“No,” a smile breaks out on his face and he rolls his eyes, “Okay, fine - yes. But only because it gets lonely around here sometimes.”

“Ah,” he watches as she curls up on her bed and hugs her knees to her chest, “Mom working a lot again?”

“Yeah,” he leans back as Selina jumps up onto his lap, scooping her up and scratching behind her ear, ”I think she's kind of stressed but you know she'll never admit it.”

She sighs, ”I'll try to give her a call tomorrow,” she brings a bag of chips into view and throws a bunch in her mouth, ”Enough of the sappy shit. Tell me something interesting. Any new ladies in your life?”

She wiggles her eyebrows at him and he puts on a serious face, “Dude, you know the rules. I don’t mind talking about celebrity hotties with you but there’s a clear no-talk rule on any girls in my life.”

She rolls her eyes, “I steal one girlfriend and you’re suddenly Mr. Sensitive.”

“Yeah, well next time I steal one of your girls you tell me how it feels!”

“Fat chance that’ll ever happen, Romeo.”

“Fuck off,” his phone vibrates and when he looks down to read it he furrows his brow, “Uh…” he looks up at the screen, “Do you mind if I borrow a shirt of yours?”

“Is there something you’d like to share with me, Kirschy Boy?”

He gives her the finger, “It’s for this girl I’m meeting soon.”

She leans forward with a wicked grin, “Is she hot?”

He scrunches his lips together, “I’m leaving now. Bye, asshole.”

He slams the laptop shut, the sound of her laughter being abruptly cut off by the loss of connection. He rarely goes into Sarah's room - they might fight when she’s home, but he would never invade her privacy like that - so it always feels a bit strange to be in there when she’s not around. He tries to find a shirt as quickly as possible and after a few options he finds one that will do the trick.

He’s changing into the new shirt when his phone goes off.

Sarah (4:23pm): Btw...I miss you, too

He smiles and is about to pocket his phone before another text comes in.

Sarah (4:24pm): Now delete that text immediately
He laughs as he picks up his keys to head downstairs, making sure to take a screenshot of the text for blackmailing purposes.

(He doesn’t want to admit it, but he hopes she comes to visit sooner rather than later.)

-----

What Carmilla was thinking when she agreed to help Laura out with her Algebra test is beyond her at this point. It is doing nothing to progress her current plan of distancing herself from Laura as much as possible. It’s bad enough that ever since last week Laura is under the impression that they have entered into some sort of unbreakable bus buddy bond, forcing her to sit beside the tiny body of excitement every morning on the way to school.

But now? Adding tutoring on top of that? She is failing horribly at this plan and it’s only been in effect for over a week.

She takes a deep breath and rings the doorbell.

There’s loud stomping coming from inside, no doubt Laura running towards the door like a pug ready to greet their owner.

The door whips open to Laura in a tank top and short sleep shorts, “Hey! You made it.”

(Nothing about this situation is fair.)

Carmilla keeps her eyes up and manages to pull off apathy, “I said I would, didn’t I?”

Laura nods and smiles, “Right.” She moves back and opens the door wider, “Here, come in, come in.”

She walks into the foyer and makes a beeline for the basement door. She opens it but there’s a soft grasp around her wrist.

She stops and turns to Laura, who suddenly looks self-conscious, “I thought we would study in my room? My desk is there and we could spread my papers across my bed when we start doing some problems.”

Carmilla smiles through the sudden panic rising in her chest at the thought of sharing a small twin-sized bed with Laura in any capacity.

(She’ll add spending alone time with Laura in her bedroom on the list of things that are proving she is horrible at sticking to her plan.)

“Sure thing, cupcake.”

Laura smiles wide and grabs her hand to lead her upstairs to her room.

(Yup. This is definitely the worst decision of her life.)

-----

They pull up to the Whataburger and she sees Kirsch awkwardly waiting outside the front doors. Her eyes widen at the sight of him and silently chastises herself for expecting him to be able to follow properly through with her request.

“Is that the boy?”
“Yeah, mom.”

(Unfortunately.)

“He looks nice.”

The hardly concealed tone of surprise is no shock to Danny.

(Yes, because apparently being gay and being nice are mutually exclusive.)

“Yeah, well - I’ve gotta go.”

She’s halfway out of the car when her mom calls out to her, “Do you need a ride home?”

“No,” she considers her options, “I’ll, uh, get a ride home from him.”

She walks across the street and quickly ushers him inside and out of her mother’s view. They line up in the queue to order their food and she looks him up and down, “Tegan and Sara? Really?”

He looks down at his shirt and back up at her, puzzled, “What? You said I needed to look gay.”

“I said wear something gay - not try and look like a newly out lesbian,” she pinches the bridge of her nose, “It’s fine. Luckily my mom still bought it.”

“Whatever,” he rolls his eyes, “Why did I have to pretend to be gay, anyway?”

She sighs, “To get my mom off my back about whether or not we were dating.”

He makes a face, “Ew. That’s really gross.”

“Right? I don’t even want to think about it.”

There’s a few seconds of silence as they move up in line before Kirsch speaks again, “You know, if you never talked I would probably date you.”

She stills, mentally adding this as reason number 83 as to why she hates him.

(The list is growing too large.)

After a second to compose herself - committing assault in the middle of a restaurant is probably not going to help her chances of getting into college next year - she speaks up, “Is there any part of that highly inappropriate and misogynistic comment that is not supposed to be offensive?”

They’re interrupted by the the cashier asking for their order. Kirsch has the audacity to ask her to pay for him since he did her a favour, bro.

(She smiles ahead at the cashier while asking for separate bills.)

As they wait for their food he turns to her, “I didn’t mean any crap by what I said. I just mean you’re hot but you’re also a total bitch.”

“What part of what you’re saying is supposed to make me feel better?”

He rolls his eyes, “I’m just saying, it actually wouldn’t be so gross if you just chilled and laid off my dick every once in a while. And also if you weren’t actually you - maybe just someone who looked like you.”
(She counts backwards from ten. She is too young and too ambitious to waste her life in a jail cell.)

“You’re disgusting,” they pick up their food and walk towards an empty booth. When they slide in she looks across at him, "And what makes you think that I would ever date you, anyway?"

“Dude, who wouldn’t?” he gestures towards himself, “Look at me.”

She barks out a laugh, "Don't remind me that I have to."

(That seems to shut him up. Nothing could make her happier.)

They sit in an uncomfortable silence and she tries to remember why she worked so hard at being captain of the Summer Society. If she knew it would include alliances like this she might have reconsidered.

It has been exactly 10 days since Kirsch’s party and luckily she had managed to avoid talking to him since then. She was hoping to keep up this routine until at least the new year.

That was until she received the email that they were going to be working together for the majority of the year.

(How important are extracurricular references for colleges anyway?)

She takes a few more bites of her burger before setting it aside, “Okay, let’s just get this planning over with so I can head home and you can go back to doing whatever it is dudebros with small dicks like to do on a Tuesday night.”

“Ha ha - very funny,” he surprises her by pulling out a notepad and pen, ideas and plans already jotted down, "Okay, we've gotta raise some funds so I started thinking of ways we can make money." He flips through a few pages and stops at one with a lot of numbers and scribbles, "So, I did some research and our cheapest way to make money would be a car wash because-"

"Because then you get to stare at girls in bikini’s?” She scoffs, "Your creepy motive couldn't be more transparent."

He rolls his eyes, "I was actually thinking we could have the Zetas all in speedos doing the car wash while the Summer Society girls did the intake."

She studies him for a second before grabbing some fries off of her tray, "Oh?"

"Yes. I don't know," he shrugs and takes a big bite of his burger, "I just thought it would be kind of like a fun twist on what's usually expected."

She considers this for a second and is about to comment but he continues, “Plus, chicks will get the benefit of seeing my abs."

“Oh, I’m sorry. I thought we were discussing a car wash and not a freak show.”

He seems almost hurt and she tries to look apathetic when she continues, "But...that's actually not a bad idea."

He grins, "Told you. You know, I'm more than just a pretty face."

"I would hope so since it's not that pretty to begin with."

He frowns at her but she's not sure what he expects when he's staring at her with burger grease at the
edge of his lips and three different mustard stains on his shirt.

“Whatever, dude.”

They brainstorm for a while before Kirsch leaves and comes back to the table with an extra burger. He unwraps it as Danny checks her phone - another text from Natalie. That’s the third one of the hour, which makes absolutely no sense considering the last time they were together. She lets out a sigh.

“Boy trouble?”

She scowls and he takes another big bite, a small piece of meat falling to his shirt.

(She feels so sorry for Tegan.)

“She’s then?”

She opens her mouth to argue a retort but decides against it. She could possibly have a lot of fun with this.

“No troubles. That was just Natalie. You know, we’ve seen each other a few times after school since your party.” She picks at her last few fries and when she looks back at him she makes sure to smile extra wide, “I’d like to thank you so much for throwing that party and giving us the chance to reconnect.”

He doesn’t seem affected in the slightest and she tries her best not to frown, "I've been spending time with her, too.”

She almost chokes on the drink she was sipping but manages to play it off as if it was nothing, “Poor girl.”

He narrows his eyes but sighs, “I hate to admit this, but I’m pretty sure she’s using me.”

Danny takes a few slow bites, deciding how to continue, “How so?”

“It’s just,” he finally wipes at his face, “We were out together and things were going fine, you know? Like, I even made sure to play some Taylor Swift when we were driving to the movie.”

“It’s a wonder you could keep her away at all.”

He ignores her, “So we get there, and - you know Tucker, right?”

"Mhm," she nods, "Senior Zeta? Terrible highlights?"

He smiles, "Yeah! So, like, she’s pretty to herself most of the night but then when we get there she’s all over me. Which I’m like: okay, score. But then I notice she keeps looking over at the concession stand and Tucker is working there. Then things go back to normal when he isn’t around,” he shoves a mouthful of fries in his mouth, talking around them, “I just don’t get it.”

“I have a few strong ideas.”

“Shut up.”

She tries not to smile and rolls her eyes, pausing, “I think she’s kind of doing the same thing with me.”
His eyes light up and he leans forward, “No way.”

She runs a hand through her hair, “Yeah, I don’t know. We went for a walk around the skate park the other day and it was going well until we actually got there. Because then she seemed more interested in trying to make out with me while tossing Tucker meaningful looks than actually paying proper attention to me.”

“Dude,” he shakes his head, “That’s so shady.”

“I know!” She sips her drink and makes a face, “And Tucker? Have you even seen that guy? He’s such a tool.”

Kirsch nods, “I know.” He glances around nervously and leans forward, dropping his voice, “I’m a Zeta and this goes against about 3 rules, but he is such a dick.”

She manages a laugh, “He’s just - what is up with that hair, though? I don’t get what she sees in him, he’s not even that attractive.”

“Totally. You’re way hotter than him.”

She stills, the sudden attention forcing some heat to crawl up the back of her neck, “Thanks.” She glances down at her phone, “I think I should probably head home. I think we got enough done today.”

“Cool,” he nods, “You got a ride?”

She grimaces, “Uh, about that. You’re going to drive me home.”

“Wow, thanks for asking, Lawrence,” he rolls his eyes as they get up to throw out their garbage. They’re walking to the car and he looks at her before getting in the truck, “I’m controlling the radio this time, though.”

She laughs, “It’s cute that you think that.”

(They’re driving for about ten minutes before she lets him switch the station. Maybe he’s deserved it a bit.)

-----

“Do you really think this is a good idea?”

She’s leading the way down the stairs of Laura’s basement and let’s out a sigh, “If I had to hear I’m never going to understand this come out of your mouth one more time I was going to explode.”

They reach the bottom of the stairs and Carmilla sees that Laura is following her with a pout. She rolls her eyes, “I’m just saying that maybe you need to take a break. You were actually understanding most of it but were too stuck on the trouble problems to realize it.”

Laura smiles at that and she considers it a win, “I guess I also feel bad that I dragged you over here to help me study and now we’re not doing that.”

“Are you kidding me? I would way rather do anything other than studying.”

Laura turns to her and grins, “Watch out - that sounds dangerously like you enjoy hanging out with me.”
Carmilla doesn’t dignify that with a response, instead walking past her to the entertainment unit, “Alright, show me this gaming collection you have.”

Laura plops herself on the couch, “It’s in the cabinet to the left of the TV.”

She kneels down and opens the cabinet, frowning when she looks inside, “This one?”

“Yup.”

“And this is it?”

“Yeah, they should all be in there.”

She turns to face Laura, “I thought you said you had a gaming collection.”

Laura furrows her brow and gets up to walk towards Carmilla, kneeling beside her, “Maybe my Dad moved them?” She looks inside and then smiles, “Oh no, they’re still here.”

Carmilla stares at her blankly, “Sweetheart, this isn’t a gaming collection.”

Laura laughs, “Of course it is.”

Carmilla pulls out a few games, “Mario Kart? Jeopardy? *Wii Sports*?” She looks at Laura incredulously, “Who the hell actually considers this a collection?”

Laura crosses her arms, “*I do* as a matter of fact.”

“Well I hate to break it to you, sunshine, but this is far from one.”

She rummages through a few more things and looks back up at Laura, “And you only have a Wii? Do you have an Xbox? A playstation?”

Laura shrugs, “I never saw the appeal of any of those games. These are a lot more interactive.” She plays with her shirt and gives Carmilla a face, “Plus, *Wii Sports* is not as easy as it sounds.”

Carmilla barks out a laugh, “That’s highly doubtful.”

Laura grins and raises an eyebrow, grabbing the controllers, “Wanna bet?”

She bites her lip to stop the smile threatening to break on her face, “And what do I get if I win?”

Laura shrugs and turns the game on, “I’m sure I can think of something worth your while.”

(This is definitely going to be the end of Carmilla as she knows it.)

----

Perry writes a few notes for her German homework when she can see the light flash from her phone on the edge of her bed. It must be done charging. Not even a few seconds pass when she can hear a long series of vibrating notifications from it. She leans over and grabs it, smiling down at the phone.

**My Person <3 (5:23pm):** *I’m really bored. You should entertain me.*

**My Person <3 (5:23pm):** *Babe.*

**My Person <3 (5:30pm):** *Baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaabe.*
My Person <3 (5:35pm): Send our code word if you are in danger.

My Person <3 (5:48pm): Okay, your phone is probably dead. Or maybe you’re sleeping.

My Person <3 (5:49pm): And yet.

My Person <3 (5:49pm): I still need entertainment.

My Person <3 (5:53pm): Science to the rescue!

My Person <3 (5:55pm): Did you hear about the guy that died skydiving?

My Person <3 (5:55pm): He was having so much fun and thought deploying his parachute would be a total DRAG.

My Person <3 (6:03pm): You know who you can’t trust?

My Person <3 (6:04pm): Atoms.

My Person <3 (6:04pm): Because they make up everything.

My Person <3 (6:12pm): Hey. Babe. I’ve got a really important question for you.

My Person <3 (6:13pm): Did you eat a bunch of beryllium, gold and titanium?

My Person <3 (6:13pm): Because you are BE-AU-TI-full.

She can hardly contain the smile on her face as she dials 1 on speed dial and settles into her pillow.

It doesn’t even go to half a ring, “You’re alive!”

“Sometimes I wonder who is the more worried one in this relationship.”

“Well, you’re about to be when I tell you what I’ve been up to without your superior guidance to deter me from making terrible decisions.”

She sighs through a smile, “How many band-aids did you need this time?”

“Only three. The solution was only partly corrosive. So that was a plus.” She laughs at them and runs a hand over her face as they continue, “So, are you busy?”

“Only an exciting Tuesday night of exploring German syntax.”

“Oh,” there’s a pause and she can hear them shoving a bunch of chips in their mouth as they turn on their laptop, “Wanna watch old Hell’s Kitchen re-runs with me instead?”

She glances at her homework and shrugs, reaching on the floor to grab her laptop, “With an offer like that, how can I refuse?”

They laugh and she grins into the phone, “Baby?”

“Hmm?”

“Why are chemists so great at solving problems?” There’s silence on the other end of the phone and she continues, “Because they have all of the solutions.”
Her smile grows as she waits for their response.

“*I fucking love you so much.*”

She shakes her head and laughs, opening up a tab and loading an old episode.

(It’s not hard for her to remember they’re each others person for a reason.)

-----

Well, tonight was quite the experience.

The past two hours consisted of a rotation of Laura’s *extremely limited* video game collection. They started off with Mario Kart because at least Carmilla can admit that she enjoys that game. She could tell that Laura was trying very hard not to comment on Carmilla always choosing Bowser as her character for the races.

(She almost hoped she did so she could comment on how painfully obvious it was that Laura always chose *Toad*.)

Laura then tried to get them to do Jeopardy but that lasted about four minutes because Carmilla was trying to get them to take a break from school, not learn extra pointless facts for fun.

They surprisingly spent the most time playing Wii Sports because Laura was absolutely determined to win at *something* that night.

(It’s not Carmilla’s fault that she’s a quick study.)

They rotated through the entire sporting catalogue: water-skiing, bowling, golf, ping pong - *everything*. She saved tennis for last because - according to Laura - it was the secret weapon that she was keeping up her sleeve.

It took approximately four rounds for Laura to start to admit that maybe this wasn’t just beginner’s luck but actual skill on Carmilla’s part. Which - at least Carmilla thought - might have deterred Laura from the game but no, this only drove Laura even more determined to beat her.

This almost worked to Laura’s advantage because with each increased look of exasperation came Carmilla’s difficulty in focusing on the screen and not staring at Laura out of the corner of her eye.

(She can’t help it. Laura when she is frustrated is monumentally more attractive than when she is calm.)

By the seventh game Carmilla can hardly believe it when she’s about to return a serve and a hard elbow connects with the side of her head.

“What the fuck?”

Laura’s eyes go wide and she steps forward, controller dangling from her wrist, “Oh my god, I am *so* sorry.”

The look of pure horror and shame is enough to set Carmilla off in a fit of laughter, “Did you just-” she tries to control her laughter and fails, “Did you just try to injure me to win a video game?”

Laura steps forward and hesitates to reach up and touch her head, “Does it hurt?”

“Extremely.”
“Carmilla,” she scowls but immediately softens her face because she’s probably remembered that she was the one who committed a violent act, “Seriously, are you hurt?”

“I’ll survive.”

Laura still smooths a bit of Carmilla’s hair, her eyebrows furrowed and lips set in a slight pout. Her eyes are trained on the injured spot and Carmilla has the luxury of allowing herself a few extra seconds to stare.

She knows she’s straddling a dangerous line with a girl who is so obviously not interested, but she keeps coming back against her better judgement. There’s something so refreshing about the way Laura tackles the world in a way that Carmilla wouldn’t dream of doing, with such an almost impossible balance of overwhelming excitement and tender softness.

(It’s almost enough to give her hope. She just isn’t sure what she’s hoping for.)

Carmilla clears her throat and gravitates back to the couch. Laura follows suit and the look of guilt on her face springs a new fit of laughter, “I can’t believe you tried to elbow me in the face just to win a game of tennis.”

Laura crosses her arms and tries to look offended but her laughter contradicts it, “It’s not my fault that you are unnaturally good at everything you do.”

She shrugs and grins, “Sorry, cupcake.”

“I still don’t believe you’ve never played Wii.”

“What can I say? I’m just very good with my hands.”

The slight blush on Laura’s face is enough to turn her grin smug. She relishes in the sight of a flustered Laura trying to nervously laugh off the comment and fiddle with her phone.

“You know, if you’re going to be such a jerk about my Wii then next time we’ll just have to play Xbox.”

Carmilla scoots closer, smiling at the way Laura’s cheeks continue pink, “Next time, huh?”

Laura avoids her eyes and makes a face, suddenly very interested in picking at her jeans, “Well, you know, if you want, obviously.”

Carmilla smiles, “I thought you didn’t have an Xbox?”

Laura shrugs, “We’ll just have to go to your place. Don’t you have one?”

“Well, but I’ll just bring it over here.” She runs a hand through her hair, avoiding Laura’s questioning gaze, “Will is such a little shit, I don’t want to bring you over and have him breathing down your neck.” Laura doesn’t look convinced and Carmilla rolls her eyes as she stands up, “We have two systems so it’s not a big deal if I bring mine over.”

Laura smiles and shifts to stand and join her, “Are you leaving already?”

“I’ve been here for three hours,” she pauses, “I figured you would have kicked me out by now.”

Laura laughs and bats at her arm, “I would never kick you out, you loser.”
She grins and shrugs, “Good to know, cutie.”

They walk upstairs and Laura hesitates by the door, “Thanks again for today. I really learned a lot.”

“On how shitty you are at video games? You’re welcome for that lesson.”

Laura scowls as she opens the door, “You can leave now.”

Carmilla mimics being shot in the heart, “Ouch. First you hurt me with your actions and now you hurt me with your words. That’s low, Hollis.”

She cannot believe herself. Here she is, in the house of a girl she should probably never hang out with in the first place, actually enjoying herself and making jokes and acting like a complete dork.

(The amount of times Carmilla questions what she’s doing tonight is record-breaking.)

Laura rolls her eyes and leans against the door as Carmilla walks onto the front porch, holding the door open, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Not if I see you first.”

She turns quickly so Laura doesn’t see the automatic smile that lights up her face at the sight of Laura’s grin.

(Sometimes change isn’t the worse thing in the world.)

-----

Laura stares at her phone for 17 minutes debating whether or not it is socially appropriate to call someone after seeing them approximately 52 minutes ago.

After another four minutes of contemplation she takes a deep breath and hits the green call button.

The seconds that pass as she listens to the dial tone are the most nerve-wracking moments of her life. She deliberates on the pros and cons of just hanging up when there’s suddenly a very low and raspy voice in her ear, “You’re making a terrible habit out of this.”

She smiles and sinks into her pillow, “Well you’re making a habit out of using terrible phone etiquette. Do you think you’ll ever answer a phone call with something resembling a hello?”

“I guess you’ll just have to wait and see.”

She grins and rolls onto her stomach, picking at her pillowcase, “I just wanted to call to make sure you got home okay.”

“That kind of question could have been sent in a text message.”

“Yes, but then how would I know if you got abducted along the bus ride home? Your kidnapper could have taken your phone and answered for you.”

She hears a sigh on the other end of the phone, “And what makes you think I’m safe right now?”

“Well, you ended up at home, right?”

There’s a pause, “I suppose you’ve got me there.”
They both sit in a surprisingly comfortable silence before Laura speaks up, “So…” she picks at her nail, “Did you watch last night’s episode of America’s Next Top Model?”

“Don’t remind me of how stupid Romeo was for headbutting Adam.”

“I know! I was so shocked. I ended up throwing a pillow at my dad, I freaked out so much.”

“You’re really bad at that, you know.”

“Oh shut up. Now tell me how pissed off you were when Lennox was actually allowed to stay.”

Carmilla scoffs and then launches into a ten minute rant about all the reasons why Lennox should definitely not have even been in the bottom two.

She rolls back over and closes her eyes, trying not to laugh too much at this being the most passionate she’s ever heard Carmilla speak about anything.

(The unfamiliar warmth settles itself back into her chest. Laura is too happy to consider what it means.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
Laura almost drops her things twice on the way to lunch, which she can’t really blame herself for. Her backpack split open in second period and she’s the only one who gets lunch in the cafeteria, which happens to be on the other side of the quad. Laura gets there last with her tray of what is essentially fancy prison food, thanks to the low standards of public school cafeterias. She unceremoniously drops three binders and her tray of food on the blanket that Perry has spread out already. Today’s picnic spread is on an orange flowered piece; Laura recognizes it as one of Perry’s mother’s.

“You know, L, there’s backpacks for this kinda thing.” LaFontaine comments from where they’re spread out across the blanket, their head against Perry’s leg. Perry is leaning back on her hands, her ankles crossed when Laura tosses the dead carcass of her backpack between them.

“Yeah, this thing wasn’t so much help today. I think I might have caught it on something.”

Perry picks it up. “Let me take it to the fashion club and see if I can’t sew it up, alright?”

“Thanks, Perry.”

She sets it to the side and LaF dumps out their lunch - two bags of chips, a beat up sandwich, and a thermos labeled ‘Lola’ - and offers Laura the plastic bag to put her things in.

Perry starts to talk about something that happened in her Economics class - the story of an extremely unfair round of review Jeopardy - and LaF leans their head back against her leg, looking up at her with the look they only reserve for Perry and science.

It takes four minutes today for Carmilla to show up.

(Not that Laura’s counting or anything.)

She drops down at the base of a tree nearby, just close enough to be within earshot, but not quite close enough to be really sitting with them.

She provides no greeting and cracks open a book. It’s tattered, and the white and yellow cover looks like it’s wearing thin.

This is the fifth time she’s joined them. Or joined Laura, who has a theory that Carmilla couldn’t care less about LaFontaine or Perry. And each time she does it, Laura can’t help but cherish it a little. In her own way, this is how Carmilla tells her she enjoys her company.

(She thinks.)
The routine never changes. Laura gives it a minute or two, waiting for any sign that Carmilla knows she’s conveniently placed herself within ten feet of Laura again. Nothing ever happens and Laura resigns to taking her school-bought bag of cheetos and tossing them into Carmilla’s lap.

Carmilla flinches immediately and the look of surprise on her face would be comical if it didn’t make Laura realize that she was probably enjoying her book and not paying attention to her. Which isn’t a self-esteem boost, but she still finds herself smiling when Carmilla opens the bag and starts eating out of it without so much as a glance in her direction until she offers Laura a small smile and Laura forgets for a moment that they aren’t the only two people in the world.

LaFontaine and Perry exchange a look and Laura shakes her head to snap out of her gaze.

(They’re already a little hesitant around Carmilla as a rule, they don’t need another reason to give Laura suspicious glances.)

“Hey, those are mine.”

Carmilla shrugs. “You threw them at me.”

“To get your attention.”

“You know, ‘hello’ works, too.”

“Just give me back my cheetos.” Laura crawls across the grass to snatch back her food. She tosses the bag back on her tray and opens her milk instead.

Carmilla just sighs and returns to her book.

The routine never changes.

LaFontaine makes a few almost harmless comments about Carmilla joining them at lunch (and as of late, pretty much everywhere else) and Perry scolds them, or joins in with a smile. It varies depending on whether or not Carmilla maintains a poker face or sours at whatever is being said.

Laura understands, she does. What LaF and Perry have is fragile and she gets that Carmilla is a bit of a risk to have around. It doesn’t make her feel any better about the way Carmilla sinks against the tree and hides her face behind her book whenever LaF or Perry catches them sneaking glances at each other.

By the time Kirsch jogs over to their spot on the grass, Carmilla’s already pulled her knees in front of her. Her face is completely sheltered by the book.

“Hey!” Kirsch is breathing heavily when he nods at them. “Laura. Laura’s friends.” He frowns at Carmilla, “Uh, Carm..... sexy?”

Before Laura can scold him, Danny shows up, skidding to a halt beside Kirsch. She’s breathing a little more evenly, but not by much. “Don’t buy from him, buy from me.”

“Sorry, what are we buying?” Laura asks. She sees LaFontaine sit up and separate themselves from Perry.

“Car wash tickets. For the car wash.” Kirsch holds up a stack of paper slips.

“As opposed to the car wash tickets for the bake sale?” Danny asks, her tone dripping with sarcasm that Kirsch either doesn’t pick up on or doesn’t care enough to acknowledge.
“Dude, whatever. It’s four bucks, who wants one?’”

Danny shakes her head. “No way, don’t buy from him, buy from me.”

Perry is the voice of reason that pipes in, “What’s the difference?”

“If you buy from me, the funding goes to the football team.”

“And if you buy from me, the funding goes to the already neglected and underfunded track team.”

Laura reaches for her wallet, even though she’s almost certain that she doesn’t even have four dollars. “Why don’t I buy from Kirsch and they buy from you?”

“Why don’t you all buy from me?” Danny offers.

“Dude, it’s for a good cause. Let somebody buy from me.”

“Ooookay,” Laura says when she sees Danny open her mouth to fire back a retort. “How about nobody buys from anybody until the car wash and then we let our parents decide who they want to donate to?”

Kirsch nods and Danny smiles. She and Laura both know that her Dad adores her and is a little suspicious of Kirsch, as any father would be of the boy his daughter almost dated in middle school.

LaFontaine swipes a bag of chips from the blanket and grabs Kirsch’s attention. “So, when’s the fundraiser?”

“Next Saturday-”

Danny cuts him off, “From 11 to 4.”

It’s then that Carmilla finally speaks up. “Look at you two, finishing each other’s sentences and everything.”

Kirsch fires back a simple, “Shut up.”

It’s followed up by a scoff from Danny. “You’re one to talk. Any particular reason you keep showing up everywhere? Wouldn’t have anything to do with your little fixation on-”

Laura thinks for a second about the possible dangers of this conversation going any further and makes a split second decision. “You know what? I can’t come, actually. To the car wash. Carm and I have plans.”

This is apparently about as wrong a choice as she could have made, because she can feel the ripple effect in the atmosphere. Danny crosses her arms with a look on her face like Christmas just came in September. Perry’s eyes widen as politely as she can manage while LaFontaine barks out a laugh. Kirsch shakes his head in a ‘what gives’ kind of way.

“Dude. Bros before hoes.”

LaFontaine smiles. “Carm?”

Laura shakes her head. “She’s not my- Kirsch, that’s a really offensive term.”

He pouts. “Sorry.”
“Since when do you go by Carm?” And yeah, Laura can already tell this isn’t something LaFontaine is gonna let go of any time soon.

Carmilla has somehow managed to sink deeper into her spot at the base of the tree, the paperback novel in her hand threatening to swallow her up completely.

(Take me with you, Laura thinks.)

Danny takes her shot and Laura cringes before she even starts to speak because Danny has her victory face on, which usually means she’s either won a race or come up with a fantastic comeback. “I’m gonna take a wild stab here and guess that she doesn’t go by ‘Carm’. But I bet you don’t mind so much when Laura calls you that, huh Karnstein?”

Carmilla finally throws the book down and snaps at her. “I don’t like it when anybody calls me ‘Carm’. And don’t call me Karnstein, either. It’s Carmilla, unless your pathetic little puppy dog lusting has clouded your brain so much that you can’t even remember my name.”

“Wait. Karnstein?” Kirsch holds up his hands. “As in Principal Karnstein? Are you my bro Will’s sister?”

Danny throws her hands on her hips and shakes her head at the sky. “How did you just realize that? We covered that in detention.”

“Oh. I guess I wasn’t paying attention.” He shrugs with a sheepish smile.

“What a shock.”

Laura’s so busy watching the almost crime scene in front of her that she doesn’t notice Perry giggling at whatever LaF had just whispered in her ear until Carmilla locks her jaw and shoves her book into her bag. She throws the strap over her shoulder and storms off just as the bell rings. When Laura turns to LaFontaine they have the decency to look guilty and Perry even frowns.

(So. That could have gone better.)

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Carmilla is somewhere between translating a page of her novel into Latin and falling asleep on her notes when the fire alarm goes off, and she’s suddenly very aware of three things. The first being that she sits too close to the back of the room because fuck that thing is loud. The second is that she’s awake now, thank you very much. And the third is that her heart is racing, which is to be expected. It’s her teacher’s almost bored announcement of “Please remain calm” that helps get her heart rate down to normal.

The teachers knew this was coming. It’s a drill. Just a fire drill.

It’s not real.

The class - which is made up of about eleven kids - it is an advanced third year Latin course, after all - gets ushered through the halls and rounded up behind the school. Mr. Winston counts each student and makes a note on a clipboard before he joins a few other teachers on one of the few benches.

Most of everyone has already scattered and joined their friends when she sees her. Laura is leaning against the wire fence that surrounds the tennis courts. Light is reflecting off of something silver in her hands. The way her lips are pursed somewhere between a grimace and a pout makes Carmilla bite back a smile. Her boots are already carrying her away from her patch of grass, the one that was a
safe distance away from the tiny enthusiastic heartbreaker that she can’t seem to keep away from. A group of jocks migrate towards the vending machines and her path is blocked until they pass, which is when she sees who Laura is with.

It’s her friend, the nerdy one who clings to the bossy one almost all the time. Neither of them have seen her yet and part of her wants to turn and walk away.

Laura’s cute, but sometimes she’s almost not worth it when her friends are burying Carmilla underneath a mountain of snide comments.

Almost.

LaFontaine spots her before Laura does and Carmilla shoves her hands into the pouch of her hoodie to clench her fists. Laura waves her over - of course she does. Her feet make the decision for her, bringing her towards them. Carmilla reminds herself for the second time today that she’ll have to get over herself. Laura is sweet to her. She’s grateful. She likes Laura. She could care less for Laura’s friends and their ridiculing.

And really, she’s heard much worse. It shouldn’t matter what they say.

( Maybe it matters because they’re not wrong.

But then again, neither is her Mother.

That doesn’t change the fact that it feels different coming from somebody Laura admires.)

When she gets close enough to see the object in Laura’s hands she raises her eyebrows. “You gonna play something for me, cutie?”

“What?” She looks down at the flute in her hand and laughs. “Oh. Yeah, I kind of panicked. They’ve never done a fire drill while I’m in band class, so.”

LaFontaine chuckles. “For future reference, we usually leave the instruments. They’re school issued and kind of shitty. Letting them catch fire can only be beneficial.”

Carmilla shrugs. “It’s just a drill, they wouldn’t catch fire anyway.”

Laura looks between them both and LaFontaine nods. “Right.”

“Well, I paid for my flute. Or, my Dad did.” She explains.

Carmilla joins Laura against the fence on the opposite side from her friend and breathes a sigh of relief when Perry joins them. She watches with a raised eyebrow when LaFontaine’s entire demeanor changes as soon as she smiles at everyone and makes a comment about it being a dangerous day for a fire drill considering how sunny it is and the fact that nobody was warned to bring sunscreen. It’s not remotely funny or even a little interesting, but LaFontaine smiles.

Someone’s whipped.

Carmilla doesn’t even bother to hide her eye roll when Clifford the big red dog and a flock of other muscular girls in jock gear come by to talk to Laura. Danny says something and Laura laughs. A girl Carmilla doesn’t recognize invites Laura to a party and she politely declines. LaFontaine shows Laura a picture of something on Perry’s iPhone.

Carmilla drops to the ground and pulls her book from her back pocket, settling against the chain link
(You don’t belong. You’re not like them. You’re not like her. You don’t belong, you don’t belong, you don’t belong.)

She’s thirty pages into her book - if she had actually gotten anywhere with it at lunch, she could have been almost done with it by now - when Laura drops down next to her and taps her shoulder.

She silently mourns the loss of her peace and quiet. Carmilla reads to tune people out. She still hasn’t quite figured how to tune out Laura Hollis.

“Hey. Can we talk?”

Carmilla doesn’t look up from her book, but she nods. “I think John Steinbeck is extremely overrated.”

“What.”

She dog ears the page. “You wanted to talk, didn’t you?”

Laura laughs and she’s so close that Carmilla can actually smell her shampoo. She knows because it’s the same smell that she smells when Laura hugs her goodbye or invades her better dreams at night. “I actually kind of had a topic in mind already.”

Carmilla doesn’t say anything but meets her eyes.

“Okay, be honest with me here.” She pulls her knees up and hugs her legs. “Do you actually want to be my friend? I mean, I know you said you didn’t mind and I totally keep beating this friend thing to death but I just- I realized today that I’m the only one that’s actually... I don’t know, trying? I just wanted to know, ‘cause I want to be your friend. But I don’t actually know what you want.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes and considers telling her the truth. No, I actually want to slam you against this fence and kiss the straight out of you. Is it mutual by any chance?

She doesn’t say that. “Not this again.”

“No, hey, I’m serious though.” Laura sighs. “I know you hate feelings and stuff, but I just have to know. Straight up.” She shrugs and then her voice drops. It’s subtle but noticeable. “Earlier you freaked out at lunch”

“I didn’t freak out.”

“Okay, you got weirded out. When I called you Carm.”

Carmilla shuts her eyes. This girl makes nothing easy.

“And I know it wasn’t because you don’t like the nickname, because I call you that all the time and it’s never bothered you. So, it’s about me using it in front of them.”

“Laura-” Carmilla tries to cut her off but Laura is already on a tangent.

“And I got to thinking, maybe it’s because you’re embarrassed by me or something. Because you always have fun when it’s just us,” Laura looks up at where her friends are standing, oblivious to the conversation that’s starting to make Carmilla’s palms sweat. “But when we’re around other people you almost never act like we’re friends.”
Carmilla curses Laura's ability to be selectively observant. She feels sweat pool at the base of her neck, and it’s not just because of the weather. She doesn’t have many options.

“So, what’s the deal? You can be honest.”

(Laura couldn’t begin to fathom how little truth there is to that statement.)

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Danny looks at her watch for the fourth time. She’s wondering how long she’s going to have to stand here and pretend there isn’t a six foot puppy dog salivating in her general direction.

Kirsch showed up just a few minutes after she did, and now he’s completely ignoring her. Which, if he thinks this is some kind of trick to get her to pay attention to him, she’s not falling for it. When she glances towards him, he’s on his phone.

Nice try, she doesn’t buy it for a second.

Every glance and shuffle towards Laura is completely pointless. She and the nightmare before Christmas are sitting at the base of the fence together, whispering about something. Laura is doing most of the talking. Danny really hopes she isn’t getting invested in the Karnstein girl. Mostly because she’s a complete asshole, but also because she’s nowhere near good enough to be Laura’s friend. But Laura is naive and kind and sees far too much good in people.

And speaking of seeing good where there isn’t anyway, he’s put his phone away and is now walking towards her.

(Is two and a half years too long of a time to know somebody and pretend she doesn’t recognize them?)

“Sup, Psycho.”

She looks him up and down with a grimace. “Why are you dressed like that?” He has basketball shorts and a muscle tee on, and he’s covered in sweat.

“I have weight training right now. It’s leg day, try not to drool.”

She doesn’t have a comeback to that, so she just settles for scoffing and checking the time again.

She has a Summer Society meeting after class and Mr. Carson usually lets her leave a little early to set up on meeting days. She’s mentally planning her excuse for being late when she hears a rattling from behind her. Danny turns to see Kirsch shaking the door to the tennis court.

“It’s locked, you dumbass.” The words aren’t even out of her mouth when the door swings open, a broken lock dangling from the handle.

“Woops.” Kirsch smiles. “Guess I don’t know my own strength.”

Danny rolls her eyes. “It was obviously loose.”

“Whatever, man.” He looks around like a kid crossing the street for the first time and then ducks inside, picking up a tennis racket and a stray ball from the corner of the court. He smiles at her and starts to bounce the ball on the net of the racket.

“May I ask what you’re even doing here?” She crosses her arms. “Don’t you have Zetas to meet up with?” Danny says it through the chain-link fence because she refuses to cross it. She isn’t going to
benefit from the destruction of school property, and more importantly, she isn’t going to benefit from something that Kirsch did.

He has horrible coordination and drops the ball at least four times before he answers. “I was gonna talk to Laura.”

“Then why don’t you?” Danny checks, and her suspicions are right. Laura doesn’t even hear her own name, she’s so engrossed in her conversation with Carmilla.

“She’s busy talking to her friend.” He wiggles his eyebrows like he knows Carmilla might be more than a friend.

“Don’t fetishize them, Laura’s straight.” Alright, Danny has eyes. She’s known Laura for a year now, been in her direct circle of friends for at least six months, and unlike Kirsch, her IQ is actually in the triple digits. She’s more than smart enough to recognize that Kirsch definitely isn’t fetishizing her, and she’s more than observant enough to recognize that Laura definitely isn’t straight. But Laura’s terrible sense of self-perception is giving her the perfect opportunity to pick on him, and she’s not going to pass that kind of chance up.

“Dude, I’m not fetishizing anybody. They’re just talking. Way to make assumptions, bro.”

Again, Danny doesn’t have a comeback to that, but she doesn’t need to. As soon as he finishes his sentence they hear a teacher bark out a yell and Kirsch drops the tennis racket and makes a break for it, bolting past a crowd of students and into what they should be pretending is a burning building.

Danny looks between the fast approaching teacher she doesn’t recognize, the broken fence lock, her direct proximity to the broken fence lock, and thinks of the Saturday detention that’s already on her record. She can’t afford one more.

She locks her jaw and makes a decision she’s going to regret.

She bolts after him.

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Apparently silence was not a good option because Laura just continues to ramble about friendship and honesty until Carmilla can hardly stand to hear another word.

“Alright just stop all of this.” Laura’s words come to a halt halfway through another sentence. Carmilla almost feels bad for saying it so harshly, so she adds, “Before I get queasy.”

Laura’s face falls immediately, her mouth dropping open and the tension in her shoulders draining. “Oh. So I was right.” She just nods and focuses her attention towards the spot of grass between them. Laura plucks at the blades and breaks Carmilla’s heart simultaneously. “You are embarrassed by me.”

Carmilla stretches her feet out and drops the book in her lap. “Cupcake.” She shakes her head and taps on Laura’s knee with her knuckles. “You are... ridiculous. And headstrong. And naive, and you have pretty horrible taste in music, okay? But, it’s not the worst thing in the world to be your friend, so.”

Laura’s face lights up and Carmilla can actually feel her dignity slipping away as she tries not to smile back.

It’s unfair, but it’s also impossible to deny at this point. This girl is all kinds of beautiful.
“Thanks.” Laura elbows her side playfully and Carmilla can’t tell if her enthusiasm gives her a little too much power behind the jab or if her side is just sensitive, but she can’t control the cringe. She’s still sore from the other night. Laura doesn’t seem to notice.

It’s just another stark reminder of her situation, and a necessary one. Forgetting causes ten times the damage that knowing does.

“Now will you please stop making me repeat this? You’ve asked me like sixteen times if we’re friends. We’re friends.” Carmilla picks up her book again, flipping to page 30.

“Got it. No more friend questions.”

This lasts for about a minute, maybe two.

“Oh, and the same goes for me, obviously.” Laura sits up, crossing her legs in her lap. She still has a few grass blades in her hand and Carmilla can see her picking them apart out of the corner of her eye. “I like having you as a friend. Maybe even... a close friend?” It starts as a statement and ends on a question. Carmilla shuts her eyes for a minute, willing herself not to get pulled into Laura’s hopeful expression. “C’mon, you’ve never wanted a best friend before?”

Carmilla’s head shoots up, a wave of hope crashing into her at those two little words. It’s sudden and it’s eager, and the excitement hits her with no warning whatsoever.

Laura panics at her sudden shift, “I’m not, I mean I’m not saying we’re best friends or that we would be, or that you’d want to be or- I just. I’ve always wanted one.”

Carmilla wants to say me, too. But she can’t. She can’t because showing that kind of vulnerability is weakness. She can’t because that kind of vulnerability is what breaks her. And she can’t because, frankly, this isn’t safe territory. So she settles for a shrug and grips the pages of her book tighter.

“What about you and Tweedledork?”

They both glance up at LaFontaine and Perry, who have moved to a spot underneath a tree where they’re whispering to each other.

She shakes her head. “No, LaF has Perry. It’s always been just them.”

Laura claps the dirt off her hands and stares at LaFontaine and Perry.

Carmilla stares at Laura.

“I’ve just always wanted what they have, I guess.” She shrugs.

“And what exactly do they have?”

Laura pales and chuckles. “They’re friends. Obviously.”

Carmilla looks at the way LaFontaine is smiling up at Perry and she doesn’t believe a word of it.

“Well, it’s not always what it’s cracked up to be.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve had a best friend before.”

“Oh.” This floors Laura as much as it does Carmilla. She’s never told anyone about Ell. “What was she like?”
“A lot like you. Not enough like me. Not as stubborn as either of us.” Carmilla slides her fingers across the binding of her book, trying to lose herself in it’s aged texture and not the memories threatening to cloud her thoughts.

For the first time since they’ve met, Laura doesn’t have much to say. She just leans back against the fence and nods. Carmilla doesn’t even bother to start reading again, she knows it won’t last.

Laura turns, “Can I ask you something?”

Carmilla bites back a sarcastic comment because Laura is trying here, and if she’s being honest, so is she.

“Why did you get upset at lunch?”

Carmilla chews on the inside of her mouth and takes in a deep breath through her nose. There isn’t a delicate way to approach this without sounding like a coward. “Who says I was upset?”

“You walked away without saying goodbye. Usually you walk me to class.”

It’s a mercy that none of Laura’s friends are around to hear that. “I had places to be.”

Laura narrows her eyes at her and Carmilla finally looks at her, really looks at her. There’s red around her eyes, like she needs to get a few more hours of sleep. Her hair is a mess from the wind and her lips look soft. There’s an eyelash on her cheek.

All kinds of beautiful.

“Your friends don’t like me.”

“What? That’s ridiculous, of course they...” Laura falters when Carmilla gives her a doubtful look. “They have their reasons.”

Carmilla can’t deny the sting in her chest.

“But it’s not about you, I promise.” She doubts that. “It’s just... new people. It’s always been just the three of us. And sometimes Danny. But if I like you, they’ll like you. Alright?”

Carmilla shrugs and places her hands on the ground to adjust her position. Laura takes the opportunity to lay her hand across Carmilla’s.

And she truly is a disaster because that’s all it takes for Carmilla’s breath to catch.

“And I do like you.”

Carmilla nods. “Yeah.”

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Kirsch runs in a zigzag pattern, like he’s dodging bullets. Which is stupid as hell, especially when she’s trying to chase after him while simultaneously avoiding getting the suspension of a lifetime.

(Speaking of which, why the fuck is she running too?)

He ducks through the gymnasium door and she doesn't slow her speed, but he does. Danny goes crashing into his back and she curses Newton's first law as she does so.
"Dude, what the fuck?" They stumble together through the door and it shuts behind them. "You're supposed to scatter when some dude is chasing us."

"Yeah, and give you a 50/50 chance of getting out of trouble? Not a chance."

Kirsch squints. "Would you even let me go if you got caught? You'd tattle on me, wouldn't you?"

"God, tattle? What are you, five?" Danny puts a hand to her head. She's trapped in a gym now with a five year old idiot and somehow he's kind of calling the shots.

"Whatev-" Kirsch cuts himself off when they hear a door being opened from the opposite side of the gym. He grabs her arm and tugs her underneath the pull-out bleachers by the basketball court. Which is great, really. Because they're both over six feet tall and the support bar underneath it couldn't be higher than 5'10". She feels the impact at the same time that he does, but he must feel it a lot harder because his eyes bulge and his face takes on a cartoonish look as he tries not to curse. It's so stupid that she finds herself smiling.

"Do you think he saw us?" She whispers.

It takes him a second to recover. "Dude, no way."

"What happens if he sees us?"

He shrugs. "We get detention." Kirsch swallows when he sees the way her eyebrows go up. "Dude is this your first time ducking out of a punishment or something? Just relax."

"No," She whispers through clenched teeth. "As a matter of fact, it's not. In case you've forgotten, I already had to run from Beckett on the football field when you were too stupid to not get us caught."

"Bro. Not my fault. I never knew he was gonna show up." He cocks a smile. "You know we keep bumping into each other lately. Do you have a crush on me or something?"

Danny rubs a hand down her face. "God, don't make me vomit."

"Ouch, someone's a little sensitive." He looks way too cocky for his own good, it's got to be reaching dangerous levels.

"I'm gonna show you sensitive if you don't shut the hell up."

He nods and almost hits his head on the bar again. "Okay. Easy. Truce? Just until we get out of here without getting suspended?"

She sighs. "Fine."

"You know, I totally know a way to get out of here without getting caught."

She raises her arms by her side, and this time it's her hitting the support bar. "I'm all ears."

Kirsch grins. "I'll race ya."

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"So, whatcha reading?" Laura offers Carmilla a smiles and cringes at herself. Yeah, she’s starting to run out of things to talk about, but she really wants to recover from her previous word vomit session.

And Carmilla has a really nice voice. So, that’s all the more reason to start a conversation.
“Anthem.” Carmilla holds up the cover to show her the title.

“Oh. I haven’t read that one.” Carmilla doesn’t offer anything in response, but Laura doesn't back down from challenges that easily. "Do we have to read that in English III?"

Carmilla shrugs her shoulders. "I wouldn't know, I'm in AP Lit."

"Is it good?"

"It's the story of a man raised in a damaged collectivist society where no one is taught the concept of individualism. He has his identity stripped and reassigned to him at birth."

She lost her at ‘damaged’, but at least Carmilla's talking in that insanely hypnotizing voice of hers. Laura nods like she has any idea what that means. "I, uh, I like romance novels."

Carmilla smiles like that's predictable, and maybe it is. She's okay with being a little predictable sometimes.

"This is a romance, in a way." Carmilla fidgets with the corners of the pages. "The main character, they call him Equality 7-2521-"

"Oh, that's pretty, is it french?"

Carmilla actually smiles at her joke, looking down and shaking her head. It’s another one of those moments that makes Laura wonder why she’s so self-conscious of her smile.

(It’s a really pretty smile.)

“Sorry, sorry, go on. Romance.”

Carmilla folds the paperback back and forth in her hands. “He meets a girl. She’s... they’re not able to be together.”

“Ah.” Laura nods. “Romeo & Juliet, huh?”

Carmilla shakes her head. “It’s more than that. They don’t even have a concept of love in this society. It’s difficult for him to even understand why he wants this girl. Why, of all the people he’s met, he prefers her. Love isn’t permitted by the Council, which makes it a sin.” Carmilla is staring blankly at the book in her hands now. “But she’s so beautiful, he’s glad to be a sinner.”

Laura realizes her mouth has been hanging open. She closes it, swallows, and says, “Wow. Well, let me know if they end up together.”

“They do.”

“You’ve read it before?”

She nods, blinking out of her haze. “It's one of my favorites.”

Laura bumps her knee into Carmilla’s. “Well see, we’re already good at this friendship thing. I know your favorite book.” Laura tucks her hands underneath her. “How do they end up together?”

Carmilla pushes back her bangs. “They fall in love. He gets taken, trapped, tortured. He runs away and she runs after him. They find a cabin in the woods and live there.”

Laura finds herself smiling because, yeah, she remembers the fanfiction that she read just this
morning that went a little like that.

A few yards away, LaF and Perry are huddled a little too close under the shade of a tree. Laura smiles when Perry wipes something off of their cheek. The way they look at each other makes Laura wonder if one day they’ll run away together, just the two of them. She knows they’d be more than happy if they did.

(Yeah, she really needs a best friend.)

Laura lets Carmilla actually read for a while, only sneaking glances at her once every few minutes. She’s really just strikingly beautiful, and it’s something Laura has been trying not to notice. Because that’s kind of a strange train of thought to have around your friend. It’s not one she’s had before, except for maybe with Danny. Danny is good looking too, but so are all of her friends. Still, Carmilla is particularly beautiful. Maybe it’s the stark contrasts: pale skin against dark hair, dark clothes revealing patches of pale skin wherever her jeans are torn. Her mind keeps wandering to the things Carmilla said.

*I don’t need a safe space to talk about how much I love fucking girls.*

*Well for starters, it’s not hard to kiss a girl.*

*That thing in the library was not a kiss.*

This isn’t the first time Laura has found herself wondering what makes a real kiss, and it won't be her last. She’s never had one, not really. Her first kiss with Kirsch was less than epic. Seven minutes in heaven, six of which she spent talking like a nervous wreck. She wonders how many real kisses Carmilla has had, and in that vein, how good of a kisser she is.

Which is weird, she knows that. But she’s always been a curious girl, and these are her private thoughts. She’s allowed to think about this kind of thing.

(She also wonders if Carmilla finds her attractive. It’s a genuine question. Carmilla likes girls. Laura is a girl. Harmless curiosity.)

Her face is a little warm when the alarms shut off and the teachers start to usher everyone back inside.

Laura stands first and offers her hand to Carmilla. She pulls her up, and either Carmilla pushes herself forward or Laura vastly overestimates how much she actually weighs, because Carmilla comes crashing into her. A warm hand lands on Laura’s waist and Laura starts to process everything too fast and too much.

Carmilla’s fingers grip at her shirt for a fraction of a second. Laura’s heartbeat peaks. Their right hands are still clasped together. It takes a dizzy second for Laura to locate her hand, it’s on Carmilla’s shoulder. Carmilla has a split lip, something she didn’t notice until she was, well, inches from her lips. Her mouth parts and her eyes scan Laura’s body, searching for something Laura hopes she finds. She looks overwhelmed and Laura shakes her head. Of course. She’s being weird. Again.

“Uh, sorry.” Laura lets out a breathy laugh and Carmilla looks almost as embarrassed as she feels. “Didn’t mean to...” Laura steps back and gestures between them. She must look like a complete dork because Carmilla grins. It’s that same beautiful smile again and Laura is glad it doesn’t disappear, even when LaFontaine comes by to tell her they’re almost late to class, followed by Kirsch and Danny who show up laughing and out of breath.
An hour later, Laura peeks into the empty band room, the usual site for LaF and Perry’s GSA meetings, where LaF is currently struggling with fitting a textbook into their backpack. The late buses left minutes ago, but Laura usually catches a ride with them and Perry anyway.

“Hey.” She offers them a wave. “You coming?”

“Yeah, yeah, just gimme one sec. My bio book doesn’t wanna come home.” They struggle with the zipper for a few more seconds before giving up and carrying it. They sling the bag over their shoulder and frown. “Hey, you okay?”

“I kind of wanted to talk to you about something.”

“Go for it.”

This is one of the things she loves about LaFontaine. Perry might act like the mom friend of their group, but LaF never makes the serious discussions nerve-wracking. They drop next to each other in two seats before Laura talks. “It’s about Carmilla.”

LaF slumps against the seat. “Yeah, I know.”

“You know what I’m talking about, right?”

“They nod.

“She told me that you guys don’t like her. Which is totally silly, but-”

“L, you know it’s not that-”

“I know. I know.” Laura nods. “I get it, you’re just nervous about people who don’t know about you and Perry. But she doesn’t get that. And even if she did, would it be so bad-”

They cut her off. “It’s not that. Laura, her mom is the principal. My mom works for her Mom. I don’t know anything about her, I can’t just...”

Laura shakes her head. “That doesn’t mean you have to make her feel like nobody wants her around.”

They run a hand through their hair. “I don’t get why you like this girl so much, L. I don’t. She’s just rude.”

“She’s not-” Laura huffs, this is difficult. ”You know what? You two have a lot more in common than you think. Do you know why she doesn't have any friends?” LaFontaine doesn't provide a guess. ”Because she's scared. She's scared to let them in, so she acts rude and says mean things, because maybe if the person trying to be her friend doesn't feel like trying anymore than it's not her fault.” Laura shakes her head in disbelief. ”I just don't get why you have to treat her like this.”

LaF takes a deep breath. ”Laura, you know our situation. You know my situation. I can't risk it. I can't risk anything. She's not worth it.”

"I'm not asking you to come out to her, I'm just asking you to be kind. Kindness, is it really so difficult?"
LaFontaine clenches their jaw and focuses on their hands.

Laura lets out the breath that had settled in her chest. She feels her face scrunch up in that way everyone tells her it does when she gets angry. "I guess I have my answer."

"Laura-"

She shakes her head and grabs her things, not looking behind her as she walks out.

"Laura, how are you getting home?"

"I'll call my Dad."

LaFontaine slumps into their car, shoving their bag in the backseat where Laura would be sitting if everything hadn’t just gone to shit.

Perry is in the passenger seat, and just her presence helps calm them.

But it's still not enough, which is bad news.

She takes out her headphones and frowns. “Where’s Laura?"

They let their head fall back against the headrest and resist throwing their head back a few more times. “She’s calling her dad for a ride."

“What’s wrong? What happened?"

LaFontaine closes their eyes. “We fucked up, Perr.” No. No, this isn’t her fault. It’s never her fault, is it? Always them. Every fight they have, every shitty situation they get stuck in together, it’s never Perry’s fault. An all too familiar weight settles over them and they shake their head. “I fucked up.”

The urge is back, and they can feel their heartbeat pick up. Which, when they think about it, is pathetic. And terrifying. Completely terrifying, because they’re arguing with Laura and that urge is already back. Over a stupid argument. It scares them how little it takes to bring them back to that place. They grip the steering wheel in front of them. Perry can’t know. Perry can’t see.

“Carmilla told Laura that she doesn’t think we like her.”

Perry sighs, putting away her headphones and turning off her phone.

“And Laura basically implied that we’re shutting her out.” It eats away at them, because it’s true. It’s completely true, and they know it. But so much is happening at once, and the bottom line is all too simple. Carmilla doesn’t feel worth the risk. Carmilla doesn’t feel worth the stress. Carmilla doesn’t feel worth the itch, or the lies, or the late nights, or the anxiety attacks, or the cravings.

“Are we shutting her out, Perr?” They know the truth, but they ask it like permission.

And LaFontaine gets exactly what they feared, but the exact words they needed.

Perry reaches out and lays her hand on top of theirs. Their palm turns up, their thumb grazing the side of her hand.

“Sweetie.” Perry takes a deep breath. “We do what we have to do.”
LaFontaine feels the drop of a stone in their chest.

This is why they hate secrets.

-Laura (9:13): have you heard of faking it?
-Carmilla (9:14): Faking what?
-Carmilla (9:14): orgasms?

Laura’s eyes bulge and she blushes furiously. Yeah, she could have phrased that a little better. She’s suddenly very glad that she’s alone in the kitchen. Surrounded by homework that she should probably be doing, but thankfully: alone.

-Carmilla (9:14): Certainly heard of it, never needed to.

Laura looks up from her phone and focuses on her chemistry homework. Her eyes fixate on the word ‘Nitrogen’ while she does everything to get that visual out of her mind.

-Laura (9:16): No, it’s a show on mtv.
-Carmilla (9:17): What’s it about?
-Laura (9:17): A girl who wants to be popular so she and her best friend fake being lesbians
-Carmilla (9:19): And on what planet does being a lesbian make you popular?
-Laura (9:20): The high school they go to is rly progressive!
-Laura (9:20): I only ask cause season 2 starts tmrw and I have nobody to watch it with

“What’s so funny?”

Laura jumps in her stool and her phone clatters against the tabletop. Her Dad is leaning against the kitchen counter with a mug of something in his hand.

“Dad! Hey. Uh, nothing’s funny. Just... texting a friend, doing some homework.” Her screen lights up with another message.

“A boy?”

“Uh, no. Not a boy. It’s Carm.” She unlocks her phone.

His facial expression relaxes when she assumes he realizes she isn’t texting potential stalkers.

“It’s getting kind of late.”

Laura nods, not really registering what he’s saying.

-Carmilla (9:21): How many episodes are there?

Laura giggles. Someone just folded like a lawn chair.

-Laura (9:21): 8! And they’re only 20 minutes long if you don’t count commercials
Carmilla (9:21): Is it worth my time?

Laura (9:22): Totally!

She almost forgets that her Dad is still there until he speaks up again. “You girls seem to be getting along really well.” He leans up against the table and takes a sip of his coffee cup. She’s suspicious of his smile.

“Yeah, she’s... not what I expected.”

“She’s definitely the most interesting friend you’ve made. How did you two meet?”

“You know that project I had to work on? For my health class?”

“The one with your worthless jerkface partner?” He asks, doing his best imitation of her. Which is a pretty good imitation, but she’d never tell him that.

“Yeah. She was the jerkface partner.”

He looks impressed. “Why am I not surprised?” Laura smiles when he stands over her, clapping a hand over her shoulder. “You’re like your Mom that way, always giving people a second chance.”

Laura nods and feels the warm prick of tears in her eyes. She’s sure that if she looks up at him, she’ll see the same look. “Thanks, Dad.”

“Tell you what, if you like this girl so much, why don’t you invite her to stay the night one of these days? You always have so much fun when Danny and the other girls come over.”

Laura slumps in her seat. “Yeah, I don’t think Danny and my other friends would want her to come over on those nights.”

“Why not?” He must sense her sudden shift in mood, because he pulls out a stool next to her.

“They don’t like Carmilla very much.”

Her Dad sighs and folds his hands together on the tabletop. “You know the guys at the station didn’t like me at first.” She raises her eyebrows at him and he nods. “Oh yeah. I was the new kid on the block back in ’96.”

She’s heard this story about forty times, but he loves to tell it. She kind of loves to hear it.

“My first day on the job, I pulled over this nice lady. She was speeding. She had this adorable little pearl necklace, reminded me of your grandmother, actually. Sweetest thing I’ve ever met, apologized and everything. She told me she was just a little late to pick up her grandson from daycare and, well, I let her off with a warning. I go back to the station and two hours later somebody puts out an APB for her car. Turns out...”

Laura nods and finishes his sentence, “She was a jewelry thief.”

“I reported the whole scene, the guys all picked on me for the longest time. But you know what, some of those guys are my best friends now.”

Her phone lights up with another message but Laura doesn’t touch it. “Yeah, I don’t think that’s really the kind of situation we’re in. Too much compassion isn’t Carm’s problem.”

“Kiddo, I’ve met your friend, she’s been over here a few times. You know I’m good at reading
people.” He stands and picks up his coffee mug. “If you don’t think that girl has a drop of compassion in her, then you don’t know a thing about her.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, really. Just because your friends don’t see it, even if she doesn’t see it yet, that doesn’t mean it’s not there. She's a sweet kid, just like you. Just a little rough around the edges.”

Her phone lights up again with another message reminder and he must see it because he squeezes her shoulder and walks away. “Don’t stay up too late.”

Carmilla (9:24): Are you doing anything right now?

Laura (9:27): Nope, just homework.

Laura (9:27): What about you?

Three loading dots in the text bubble pop up while Carmilla types. It disappears after a few minutes and Laura can’t help but feel a little disappointed. She puts her phone down and focuses back on her homework.

Chemistry is not her strong suit. She considers calling LaFontaine for help until she remembers the fight.

Her phone lights up again, completely wiping the frown of her face. The caller ID says Carm over a picture of a very disgruntled Carmilla who refused to smile for a contact picture. It’s still kind of a cute picture if she looks at it long enough.

Which she doesn’t do.

Instead, she unlocks her phone. “Hey.”

“Hey.”

“What’s up?” Laura closes her chemistry textbook and awkwardly shuffles her paper into her binder. She won’t be getting anything done tonight.

“I’m looking at the MTV page and this show looks extremely trashy.”

“Oh, c’mon.” She pleads, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

(It’s a trashy show. She knows it’s a trashy show. That does nothing to change how addicted she is to it.)

“Fine. I’ll watch it.”

Laura hears a click on the other side of the line and stands up, hip checking her stool into the table. “Are you watching it right now?” She wanders past the living room, where her Dad gives her a smile and a wave. Laura takes the stairs two at a time towards her room.

There’s a shuffle on Carmilla’s end while Laura shuts her bedroom door behind her, dropping herself on the bed.

“I’m clicking play. Try not to get too excited.”

(Laura giggles, it’s too late for that.)
This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
“Sweetie, which shade of lipstick do you like better?”

LaFontaine glances over their shoulder at the two sticks in Perry’s hands, “Neither,” they grin at her, “It’s harder to kiss you in secret when you wear lipstick.”

Perry rolls her eyes and moves to stand beside LaFontaine, inspecting both shades in front of the mirror. They go back to adjusting their bow tie when they can feel Perry staring at them.

“What?”

They look over and she’s grinning, “That’s my favourite bow tie, you know.”

“Really?” They smile into the mirror, trying to remain aloof, “I had absolutely no idea.”

Perry steps back and slides behind LaFontaine, dropping her chin on their shoulder and wrapping her arms around their waist, “It’s not fair for you to look so cute at school.”

(Well, it’s not fair for Perry to be so close with those perfect curls and smelling like flowers in the spring, but it’s not like LaFontaine is complaining about that.)

They fiddle nervously with the tie, willing their voice to sound confident, "Who says I like playing fair?"

Perry tugs at their side a bit and they get the hint, turning so that their back is pressed against the mirror. They watch as Perry darts her tongue out to the side of her lips as she concentrates on fixing LaFontaine’s bow.

After she finishes with it she smooths the sides a few times, hands finally resting on LaFontaine's shoulders. The heat from their cheeks must mean they’re pinking if the slight smile on Perry’s face is any indication.

“I wish we weren’t at school right now.”

All they’re able to muster in response is a slight nod and quick gulp.

They know they shouldn’t lean forward and press their lips against hers. They’re at school and
anyone could walk in. There are about fifty things that come to mind right off the bat on why this is a bad idea.

But then Perry is looking at them like they strung the stars in the sky and they knew from the beginning that they had no chance.

(Since when has knowing what they shouldn’t do stop them before?)

She tastes like cinnamon and sugar, the sweetness overwhelming their senses. Perry presses them further into the mirror, the cool surface doing wonders for the heat radiating off the back of their neck.

She reaches up to cup their cheek and they smile into the kiss. Perry is doing that thing with her tongue that drives LaFontaine crazy and-

The bathroom door squeaks open and they roughly push Perry off. LaFontaine stares with wide eyes as Carmilla walks towards them. She raises her eyebrows in their direction and passes them both towards one of the stalls.

She enters it wordlessly and locks the door behind her. They stare at Perry and her expression must be no better than their own. She starts to pace in front of them, rushing out in a whisper, “We have to do something.”

Their heart starts to race, the room suddenly feeling so much smaller than it was a few seconds ago. They run a clammy hand through their hair, any words of comfort getting lodged in the back of their throat.

Perry continues to pace when the sudden harsh sound of the toilet flushing makes them jump. Carmilla walks out and stalks towards the sink, barely giving them a glance as she washes her hands. She goes to the hand dryer and slowly dries them off, inspecting her nail polish for a few moments before turning towards the door.

Perry looks at them in panic before rushing forward to block Carmilla’s path.

(They’re rooted to the spot. Everything is closing in around them.)

“What the hell, Carrot Top?”

Perry shakes her head, “Listen, Carmilla - about what you may or may not have just seen - you can’t say anything-”

Carmilla scoffs, “Oh, please. That hardly qualified as exciting. Don’t flatter yourselves.”

Before Perry can get in another word Carmilla steps around her and is out the door.

(They can’t breathe. They can’t breathe. They can’t breathe.)

They focus on taking in big breaths but everytime they try it feels as if the air isn’t quite reaching their lungs. They can see Perry about to make a run after Carmilla but they manage to get out a strangled, “Perr.”

She’s by their side in an instant and her presence is doing nothing for the hammering feeling in their chest. Their heart is beating so fast that it feels like it might jump out of their skin. Their breaths continue to come in short bursts and they’re suddenly gasping, shaking their head as Perry roughly grabs at their shoulders.
“Sweetie, sweetie - look at me.”

They continue to shake their head, screwing their eyes shut and trying not to think about how faint they’re starting to feel from the lack of oxygen entering their system.

It’s all a trick of the mind - it’s all in their head - but they can’t stop the overwhelming sense of dread and doom that comes with the fleeting thought that they feel like they’re dying.

“LaFontaine,” a cool hand against their cheek, “LaFontaine.”

Her voice brings them back and they open their eyes, her look of concern making knots in their stomach. They continue to gasp for air, stepping back and connecting with the wall. They slide down it until they’re sitting down with their knees hugged to their chest.

“She can’t-” they gasp for another breath and get punched in the head with how dizzy they feel, “Perry, my mom is here and-”

Perry crouches down, grabbing their wrists and squeezing gently, trying to ground them, “Honey, you are okay. You are okay. Focus on the feel of my hand. Focus on my breaths,” she mimics deep breaths and they will themselves to look up and try to copy her.

It takes a few tries but finally there is that moment when they suck in a deep breath and the air finally seems to rush in and connect with their lungs. The panic slowly starts to subside - although their breaths are still coming in ragged and shaky - and the room is starting to come back into focus.

A coolness washes over them and Perry squeezes their wrist gently before getting up to grab some tissues from a stall and a water bottle from her bag. She walks back and passes the water bottle into LaFontaine’s hand, “Here, drink some of this.” She unscrews the cap and they take a slow sip while she dabs the tissue to remove some of the beads of sweat that have formed on their forehead.

They close their eyes at the feeling, relishing in the feel of Perry’s hands moving down to caress their cheek.

“That was so fucking stupid.”

Perry sighs, “I know, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have-”

“No,” they shake their head, “It was my fault. I’m the one that kissed you.”

“I certainly didn’t discourage it.” She moves to sit beside LaFontaine, blowing out another breath, “Maybe we could talk to Laura. Get her to talk some sense into Carmilla.”

The sick feeling churns in the pit of their stomach, “I don’t really think she’s going to be too eager to grant us any favours right now.”

“Sweetie, she’ll understand. She has to.”

All they can do is nod and ignore the gnawing guilt chewing up at their insides.

“You know, I know that this isn’t ideal. And I hate that we have to sneak around. But you know if we came out we wouldn’t be able to be together right?”

LaFontaine closes their eyes again, breathing out a yeah in response.

“And when we first started dating we agreed that it was better to be closeted together than be out and alone, but if you’re having doubts about that-”
“Perr, no,” they cover her hand with their own but then flinch from the touch.

(There have already been too many close calls for one day.)

“I still believe that. As long as we’re together, that’s all that matters.”

They turn to her and open their eyes, Perry’s smile the first reassuring sign they’ve felt in a long time.

(The feeling probably won’t last for long, but they’ll take what they can get.)

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“Carmilla, hey!”

Laura waves at her and Carmilla stops in her path towards the parking lot.

When LaFontaine showed up to Band fifteen minutes late she knew something was up. She was curious about it but the residual anger from their fight earlier in the week was still simmering at the surface, so she sat in her seat and ignored her burning curiosity.

She didn’t have to ignore it for long, though, because LaFontaine cornered her after class and explained everything that happened in the bathroom with them and Carmilla. Although she was still angry with them, she promised to try and talk to Carmilla as soon as possible.

Which is why she is extremely grateful to run into her on her way to the bus.

She jogs a bit and stops short in front of Carmilla, holding her side to massage out a fresh stitch.

“Someone is eager to see me.”

She rolls her eyes, “We need to talk.”

“Listen, I have to work tonight so I don’t really have time for one of your kumbaya pep talks, cupcake.”

Laura reaches forward and laces their hands together, pulling Carmilla towards the side of the building.

“I’m beginning to think that for all the talking you do, you’ve never really learned how to listen properly.”

“Carmilla, please.”

Her expression softens and she steps forward, “What’s wrong?”

Carmilla squeezes softly on her hand and the action sparks a jolt that reminds Laura that they’re still joined in the first place. She can feel her palms sweat and that is way too embarrassing to deal with right now when there are more important things at stake, so she gently removes them from her grasp and toys with the strap of her backpack.

“Nothing’s wrong. Well, um, not with me,” she bites her lip and glances around before leaning forward and lowering her voice, “Listen, so, uh, some stuff may have happened with LaFontaine and Perry today.”

Carmilla crosses her arms and blows out a breath, “Oh God, not this again.”
Laura can feel her heart race, “Now, okay, so I know you might have seen some stuff that looks, uh, pretty suspicious, but,” she lets out a nervous laugh, “Listen, Perry and LaFontaine are really close and what you might have seen may have seemed like something is going on-”

“And what makes you think I didn’t know something was going on before?”

She pales, “You knew before you saw them-” she darts her eyes and whispers out in a rush, “kissing?”

There’s something odd about Carmilla’s smile when she says, “You don’t have to kiss someone to make it obvious that you’re interested in them.”

“Oh,” she feels suddenly shy under Carmilla’s stare and she adjusts the strap of her backpack a few more times. “Okay. That’s...very true.” She fidgets her fingers, “You just can’t say anything about what you saw.”

Carmilla frowns, “Do you really think I’m the kind of person who would?”

Laura visibly deflates at the sound of sadness in her voice. Despite Carmilla’s rude facade she knows she wouldn’t say anything. She internally beats herself up for even asking her in the first place.

(She’s so bad at this whole making-new-friends thing.)

“No - no, of course not. They’re just freaking out and Perry would have probably had a stroke if I didn’t tell her that I at least tried talking to you.”

Carmilla nods, that sad smile still etched in place, “Right.” She glances towards the parking lot and then back at Laura, “I really should get going.”

“Yeah, yeah - of course. Work! Which, I didn’t even know you worked, so like, that’s really cool.” Laura winces, “Says the girl without a job to someone who probably hates their job because everyone who works hates their job.”

Some of the sadness is leaving Carmilla’s smile.

(Laura feels a little lighter.)

“I actually don’t mind my job that much. But I think my boss is going to mind if I’m late, so, you know.”

She shrugs and turns, a wave thrown over her shoulder. Laura debates internally and reaches the count of exactly 83 before she calls out after her against her better judgement, “Wait!”

It’s a good sign that she turns around with a laugh, “Seriously, I’m going to get fired if I don’t show up on time.” The threat must not be too serious because it’s not stopping Carmilla from walking right back towards her.

Laura sucks in a breath, “Are you going to be at school tomorrow?”

“it doesn’t look like there would be a reason for me not to be.”

(This was a mistake. What was she thinking?)

She lets out a nervous laugh, “Duh. Right.”

An awkwardness hangs in the air between them as Laura considers over and over whether or not she
should just ask her. Carmilla raises an eyebrow, “So...was there any particular reason you wanted to know?”

Yes. “Uh, no. It’s nothing. You should go, you’re going to be late.”

Carmilla shakes her head, “You’re very weird.”

Her cheeks pink, “I know.”

“But also very cute.”

She can only nod in response, letting out a breathy laugh and ignoring how her cheeks must have gone from pink to red, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Not if I see you first, sunshine.”

She turns and is off with a slight jog to the bus as Laura slumps against the side of the building.

(Despite feeling like an idiot, she can’t wipe the smile off of her face.)

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The bell rings loudly through the speaker system.

Mr. Beckett holds up his hands, “Don’t forget - you have chapters 6 and 7 to read over the weekend to catch up before we start the new unit next week. Now get out of here before I decide to assign some more.”

The class quickly scrambles to gather their things and start to leave the class. Laura can see Kirsch sitting in his seat, staring straight ahead and fidgeting with his pencil. She frowns to herself and throws her notebook into her backpack before approaching his desk.

“Hey there.”

He slowly blinks in her direction and offers her a weak smile, “Oh, hey.”

The smile doesn’t reach his eyes; instead they’re filled with a blank numbness that she knows all too well.

“How are you doing?” She winces. Of all the people in the world, she understands that those words are the very last thing that someone in his situation would want to hear. Especially not today. “I’m sorry, that was a stupid question.”

He smiles again - this time filled with sadness - and shakes his head, “S’okay. It’s fine.”

“I don’t have Band today since we’re playing in the game later tonight, so I’m free the rest of the afternoon. Do you want company on your walk to your next class?”

He nods, “Yeah, that would be cool.”

He puts his books into his bag with a robotic stiffness and she lets him lead the way into the hall. They walk together in a comfortable silence. She lets the wave of people passing them by drown out the thoughts and questions swimming through her head.

They get to the door of the weight room and Kirsch hesitates.
“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course,” she nods quickly, “Anything.”

His leg shakes a little and he darts his eyes around the hallway before he reaches deep into his jean pocket. He pulls out a black piece of fabric, “I, uh, I made this last night. It’s - well, the stitch job is pretty shitty and I had to get my mom to help out with the lettering. But I did the embroidering of the butterfly myself - she loved butterflies - and pink was her favourite colour, so.” He blows out a breath and shrugs his shoulders, holding it out fully for her to see, “What do you think?”

She looks down at his hand and on the thin, black band there is a messy butterfly in pink stitching beside two neater initials in handwritten script. The full weight of his pain jumps off the fabric and settles in her chest. She takes a deep breath and looks up at him with almost watery eyes, “I think it’s beautiful.”

He smiles wide, full of relief, “Yeah? It’s not lame or anything?”

She shakes her head, “Not at all. I think it’s really great.”

He blows out another breath, “Okay, that’s - thanks.” He looks down at it again before facing her, “I was thinking of maybe wearing the band around my arm during tonight’s game.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, Kirsch.”

“Could you maybe put it on my arm now? To see what it looks like?”

She nods immediately and grabs the fabric from his hands. He leans down a bit so she can reach up and tie it around his bicep without struggling. She makes sure the letters are in clear view and smooths it out a few times before pulling back.

“There you go - it looks awesome.”

He holds his arm up and smiles wide, “It really does, doesn’t it?”

“Mhm,” she returns his smile, glad that it’s finally looking a bit more genuine, “You know you’re a really great guy, Kirsch.”

Something flashes across his eyes and he smiles sadly, “Whatever you say, little hottie.”

She laughs and reaches up to give him a big hug, pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek before letting him go.

He’s about to walk into class when he pauses, “Thanks for being such a great friend, Laura.”

She shrugs, “It’s nothing. Good luck tonight, okay?” He nods at her and is about to turn when she grabs his arm, “She would have loved this gesture.”

He tenses and gulps, eyes shining. He nods quickly, “Right - thanks. I really hope so.”

She gives his arm a gentle squeeze and lets him go to class.

(He walks away with a visible heaviness. It’s something Laura has carried with her for far too long now.)
Laura adjusts the strap on her hat for the fourth time since walking towards the field to stop it from falling over her eyes. *Again.* One of the worst things about band uniforms is the fact that the budget is *so low* for the music department that they have to use hand-me-downs for every new member of the class.

(This hat *clearly* belonged to someone who had the head the size of a *whale.*)

She’s about to head towards the marching band section of the bleachers when she sees Carmilla lingering by the chain-link fence outlining the field. She glances up at the scoreboard and sees that there’s time, so she detours off the track and towards the other girl.

“Hey, uh,” the hat falls a little and she huffs out a breath as she pushes it up, “I didn’t think I’d see you here today.”

Carmilla is staring at her through the chain links - her eyes looking her up and down - with the corners of her mouth threatening to turn up. Laura rolls her eyes and lets out a sigh, “Alright, alright - just get it over with already.”

Carmilla lasts a few more seconds before bursting out laughing, “I’m sorry, cupcake, but I did *not* expect to see you in, well,” she motions with her hand at Laura’s outfit, “...*that.*”

Laura scowls and crosses her arms, “It’s *mandatory*. I didn’t choose this.” She squints slightly, “And how not? Haven’t you seen the band members in uniform before?”

Carmilla shrugs, “I’ve never been to a school game before.”

Laura’s jaw drops, “Never?”

“Nope.”

“Not even the homecoming games?”

“No.”

“Pep rallies?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“But-” she pauses, “Then what are you doing here today?”

Carmilla ducks her head and leans forward, lacing her fingers through one of the links, “A little birdy told me that the band performs during games,” she turns her head and stares down the field before looking back at Laura with a shy smile, “Thought it might provide a bit of comedic entertainment.”

Laura’s lips stretch across her face as she raises an eyebrow, “Oh, did you?” She steps forward and reaches up to grab onto the fence as well, her fingers just a breath’s space away from Carmilla’s.

Carmilla leans closer, “Mhm. It’ll be a total laugh.”

Laura bites her lip and grins, “You came to watch me perform, Carmilla Karnstein.”

“Well *you* wanted to ask me to come.” Carmilla pauses and looks down again, her fingers fidgeting in the fence, “At least, when I was thinking about our conversation after school last night that’s what it sounded like. But, you know, I could be wrong.”

Laura doesn’t think her smile could get any wider. Carmilla is just so *cute* when she’s all shy and
self-conscious. Not that she’s not attractive when she’s confident - because she really is, of course, Laura has eyes - but there’s something about the way it brings out the softness of her features that has Laura in awe.

(It’s breathtaking, almost.)

She shifts her hands so that her fingers are covering Carmilla’s, stilling her movements, “I did want to ask you to come. I just didn’t really think it was your thing.”

“Well, if you want something from me, all you have to do is ask.”

She finds herself grinning again and tugs her bottom lip between her teeth to try and control it, “Hmm, is that right?”

“Oh huh,” Carmilla shifts closer, despite the fact that there is only a very thin fence between them and most likely only a few inches of actual space between their bodies, “I mean, that’s what friends do, right?”

There’s something burning underneath her tone, and Laura can’t quite put her finger on it. It’s almost as if-

(Is she…? No. It can’t be.)

Laura licks her lips and curses these old uniforms again for being so stuffy because there is a sudden heat crawling up her neck.

“Yeah, I guess they do.” She continues to dance a pattern on the tops of Carmilla’s fingers and finds herself being drawn in closer. She doesn’t understand how one person can be so utterly and completely beautiful. She can’t look away when the light is hitting her cheek in the perfect spot, highlighting Carmilla’s smooth skin.

(She’s suddenly very upset that there is a fence in between them that’s blocking her view and she’s not even sure why.)

She watches Carmilla glance down at the bottom of her face when they suddenly hear, “Carmilla! Hi!”

They jolt back from the fence and Laura looks behind Carmilla to see Perry approaching them.

“Oh God, not this one again.”

Perry comes to a stop beside Carmilla, “Hi there.”

“I heard you the first time.”

Laura tightens her lips, “Hello, Perry.”

“Hi, Laura.”

Carmilla sighs and runs a hand through her hair, “So, where’s your partner in crime?” Perry pales at this and Carmilla groans, “It’s just an expression - would you relax? I don’t actually mean your partner.” She blows out a breath, “Jesus fucking Christ.”

Perry glances around nervously and lets out a laugh, “Of course, of course! And LaFontaine is already in the band section,” she turns to Laura, “Which reminds me, you should probably get going so you’re not late.”
“I’m aware of the time, Perry.”

Perry frowns, glancing between the two of them, “Laura-”

“Wait, band section?” Carmilla turns to Laura, “You don’t sit with the other students?”

“No?” She adjusts her hat again and huffs, “We have to sit together because we perform. Also, it’s so we’re not distracted by other people.”

“Oh,” Carmilla’s face falls and she steps forward, dropping her voice, “I just thought, you know-”

“But that’s okay!” Perry steps forward and links her arm with Carmilla, “I have a seat already saved for Carmilla.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows, “Well, about that-”

“Laura, you really should get going,” Perry tugs and pulls Carmilla in the direction of the bleachers, throwing over her shoulder, “Break a leg today!”

Laura can’t help the laugh that erupts from her throat at the terrified look on Carmilla’s face as she stares back at her while Perry is relentlessly dragging her to the seats.

She turns and leans back against the fence, allowing herself another few seconds to relish in the excitement of having someone new watching her perform. Of having Carmilla watching her perform.

She’s halfway to the band section when an overwhelming sense of fear and dread hits her right in the chest.

She is about to have someone new watch her perform.

She is about to have Carmilla watch her perform.

(Despite wanting this so badly for the past week, she clearly did not think through the consequences of having her wish granted.)

-----

Carmilla rubs her fingers against her temples. The girl sitting next to her won’t stop yelling. As in, actual ear-blasting yelling.

Apparently the guy laying down in the middle of the field is her boyfriend and he can’t afford this kind of injury because he’s due for a scholarship to Florida State next year. The scouts are coming next weekend and a stint in the hospital is going to do him no good during this critical time.

How does Carmilla know all of this? Well, it’s all the girl keeps dribbling on about in between her very real and slightly concerning death threats towards the player who knocked her boyfriend into the ground.

(God, he is so weak. Covered in layers of padding and a helmet and yet he’s still lying there like a baby. Amateur.)

She closes her eyes and breathes out a long breath. The game has been paused - is that even the proper term? - for at least ten minutes now and this would be the perfect window to discreetly slip out of the stands and make her escape. Considering the whole school is out watching this atrocity, it would actually mean the inside of the building would be relatively quiet. She might even be able to
sneak off to the Senior study hall to finish the novel sitting at the bottom of her bag.

(They have more comfortable couches than the library.)

But, if Carmilla did that, then it would mean that she wouldn’t be there when Laura turns around to look at Carmilla at her next 7 minute interval loop that she’s been running on repeat all game. And she can only imagine the tiny frown on her face if she were to look and Carmilla was gone.

So, really, she only has one option here.

And it involves putting up with the shrill piece of work sitting immediately to her right.

(She’s still not sure if it’s worse that she has to put up with this girl or live with the fact that she’s willingly sitting next to Perry and Danny on her other side.)

Perry looks up from her knitting needles, “Do you think someone should probably call an ambulance? It’s been quite some time.”

“God,” she glances at the hysterical girlfriend, “Please don’t put more ideas in this one’s head.”

Danny scoffs, “I don’t know why we aren’t just getting on with this. That tackle was clean and the impact didn’t even look that bad.” She stands up from her seat and cups her hands around her mouth, shouting, “Let’s put this show on the road, ref!”

Danny sighs at the lack of activity on the field and sits back in her seat. Carmilla smiles to herself. If she didn’t hate the other girl, she would congratulate her on having such an excellent perception of pain.

“So,” Perry turns to her, “Carmilla.”

“No - I already told you that I’m not going to discuss this with you again.”

Perry works tirelessly at the yarn in her hands, “I just want to make sure we’re on the same page.”

Carmilla sighs. Perry has been trying to talk about their little bathroom incident ever since she practically threw her into her seat. Carmilla, on the other hand, is determined to talk about this basically never.

“I don’t know what you want me to tell you. Do you expect some sort of hourly update on the status of my sealed lips?”

Danny leans over, “What are you two talking about?”

“Nothing.”

Carmilla shifts so that she’s no longer blocked by Perry’s gigantic head of curls, “I saw something yesterday that I wasn’t supposed to and now June Cleaver is going to have an aneurysm because of it.”

Danny frowns, “Perry, you two should really be more careful.”

Her eyes widen, “What makes you think that it involves anyone else?”

Carmilla shares a look with Danny because - yeah, that’s not convincing anyone around here. She slumps back in her seat and crosses her arms, “You’re both the most obvious people on the planet and I didn’t need to witness that disgusting face-sucking fiasco to figure out what is going on.”
Perry looks like she’s about to snap the needles in her hand in half, “I don’t know what-”

“No, just cut your crap. The only reason you’re pretending to be nice or asked me to sit with you is to ensure I’m in your good books. And you know what? I don’t appreciate people using me.” Perry’s eyes widen and she opens her mouth but Carmilla continues, “No, whatever. You’re both stupid, but it’s done and you’re lucky it was me who walked in and not someone else. Because me? I’m not going to say anything. And not because I’m a friend of Laura’s - although she is the large reason stopping me from hitting you right now - but because despite what you might believe, I can sometimes be a decent person. So just take a fucking chill pill and shut the fuck up about this already.”

Perry has the decency to look guilty and good - she should. The past few weeks of spending more time around Laura’s friends have been grating on her last nerves and she’s glad to finally be able to really put one of them in her place. Laura is worth it, of course, but it doesn’t mean it’s not driving her absolutely crazy.

As a pleasant surprise, though, Danny hasn’t been terrible company for most of the game, and almost a relief to interrupt Perry’s insistent nagging.

“So, Carm, I’ve been meaning to ask - what brings you to the game today?”

(Why do all good things have to come to an end?)

She paints on a fake smile and turns in her seat, “Thought I would try out some school spirit. Go Lions.”

Perry turns to her, “We’re actually the Silas Panthers.”

She rolls her eyes so painfully that they feel like they’re going to pop out of her skull.

She glances in Laura’s direction. Is she worth it? Is she really worth having to sit through two more hours of this?

(Yes.)

“So, what’s the real reason you’re here?” Danny won’t stop looking at her with that smug grin and she wants to rip off of her face. “Anything to do with your new friend that keeps looking back in this direction every ten minutes?”

As if she could physically hear them talking about her, Laura chooses that moment to turn towards them again. She smiles wide when Carmilla catches her eyes. The instinct comes naturally and before she can stop herself she’s smiling back. Laura’s face lights up a bit but she’s startled when the crowd erupts. Carmilla looks towards the field and can see the injured player finally on his feet and limping off towards the sidelines.

(She scoffs. No one has ever cheered for her when she’s had to limp away from something. This is so overdramatic.)

Laura stands to attention and the band plays some victory piece when Carmilla turns back towards Danny, avoiding her question, “You know, I’m starting to wonder why you’re here as well. Do you and the idiot have some sort of weird thing going on where you get off to watching him get his ass kicked out there?”

Danny’s face goes serious, “Hey. Lay off him today.”
Carmilla raises an eyebrow. Now that's interesting.

“Today is,” Danny pauses, “You heard about what happened to SJ last year, right?”

“I may remember a few minor details.”

That wasn’t entirely true. She knew that she passed away - that kind of thing can’t happen in a high school without everyone finding out. But she hardly knew her so she never mourned her. Which is apparently not how the rest of the school was going to handle it because the day after the car accident the whole student body acted like they were best friends with her.

But Carmilla refused; it was fake and she spent enough of her life pretending without having to add that to the list, too. Besides, Carmilla has mourned plenty of people in her lifetime to not waste time doing it for people she barely knew.

(The topic is not something she likes to think about particularly often because it sends her mind down a spiral of morbid thoughts.)

“Well, today is the anniversary of her death. She was Kirsch’s girlfriend.”

Carmilla blows out a breath. That was something she didn’t know. Her heart aches for the boy out on the field, briefly wondering the myriad of thoughts running through his mind.

She picks at her jeans, “That’s pretty terrible. Even though she was always a total bitch.”

“Carmilla!” Perry is looking at her with shock and Danny looks like she’s ready to lunge over and punch her.

“What?”

“Do you honestly have no respect for anything at all? Or is the heart in your chest truly as black as it seems?”

She clenches her jaw, “Just because someone dies doesn’t eliminate all the terrible things they did when they were still alive.”

Perry glances between them, “Maybe we should just get back to watching the game.”

Danny goes to say something but Perry levels her with a look. She scoffs and sits back in her seat with her arms crossed.

Good. Maybe they can just sit in fucking silence for the rest of the game.

“So, Carmilla, who do you think is going to score the next run?”

Danny groans, “For fuck sakes, Perry - it’s called a touchdown.”

“Oh! Sorry. So, yes, who do you think is going to touch the next down?”

“That’s not-” Danny blows out a breath, “Whatever.”

(What kind of terrible acts did she commit in her past life to deserve this kind of karma?)

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“Excuse me, I’ve gotta get - yeah, can you just shove over a few seats?” LaFontaine doesn’t wait for
them to respond but instead just side-steps over them and plops themselves down beside Laura, “Hey.”

Laura glances around the crowd, “You’re going to get in trouble for sitting in the wrong section.”

They shrug, “Whatever, the game is almost done, anyway.”

Laura stares ahead and LaFontaine blows out a breath, “So, uh, I just wanted to come and say thanks. For, you know, talking to Carmilla.”

“It’s okay.”

LaFontaine feels a twist in their gut, “I know things aren’t the best between us right now but it really is cool that you did that.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not heartless.” Laura begrudgedly looks at them, “I obviously care about you both a lot. I wouldn’t let some stupid fight get in the way of that.”

They nod but she continues, “But Carmilla? You know, I didn’t even need to really talk to her about it. She was never going to say anything.”

“Laura, how was I supposed to know that? I hardly know the girl.”

“And whose fault is that?” Laura turns to them with a fire in her eyes that makes them shrink in their seat, “You just want to be accepted, right? Then how about starting to practice what you preach.”

They feel their chest cave in. They keep making mistake after mistake after mistake. The itch is there but they ignore it.

“I’m sorry.”

Laura sighs, “Me too. It’s okay.”

They know that they’re far from okay, but Laura is almost managing a smile so at least it’s a start. They decide to throw out an olive branch, “So, uh, you’re both getting pretty close, huh?”

Laura’s entire demeanor changes. She fidgets with her flute a little bit, “Yeah, I guess so.”

They can see something about the look in her eyes that says that she’s thinking about the time she’s been spending with Carmilla. There’s something soft and playful there.

They have a vague suspicion that it might be what their eyes looked like before that eventful Zeta party they went to in Freshman year.

“Well, as long as you’re happy then I’m happy.”

Laura gives them a genuine smile this time, and yeah, it’s a start.

(They’ll be there when Laura finally takes a look in the mirror and sees what that look in her eye really means.)

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“Alright, guys. I know we’re down by a lot but if we just pull together we can get a handle on these assholes.”
Kirsch stares at the guys around the huddle and their mixed looks of frustration and pity tell him that they don’t believe a word he’s saying. To be fair, there’s five minutes left in the game and they are down by over 20 points, so it’s not much to believe in anyway. He doesn’t really have time for anymore encouragement because the play clock is still running, so he breaks the huddle and sends the guys into position.

He walks towards the line of scrimmage and can see the score taunting him on the scoreboard. His eyes fall to the screen below it, the words *Rest in Peace - Sarah Jane Wright (1997-2013)* screaming out at him.

*Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it.*

(He tries not to, but everytime he blinks he sees a booth inside Rosita’s. Her face staring across the table at him.)

His eyes scan the field and he takes in a few deep breaths, allowing himself the next twenty seconds to assess the play in front of him.

(She used to order the pork tacos but he always thought it was gross. He was a strict chicken kind of guy.)

Some players on the other team adjust their position and he wracks his brain to try and read the play. He turns to his players and wonders if he should call an audible.

(She ate her favourite kind that night and he’s at least grateful for that.)

The pressure is on and he can feel his heart beating hard against his chest. A quick glance up at the play clock shows that he only has three seconds left and he makes the decision to just snap the ball.

(He hasn’t been able to eat tacos ever since. The sight of them makes him feel sick.)

The sound of bodies colliding rush to his ears as his offensive line tries their best to keep the tackles from rushing towards him.

(He runs their last conversation over and over in his head, an infinite loop of what has now become his personal Hell.)

He shuffles back a few yards and scans the field for an open wide receiver. He was going to throw it to Jake but their coverage is going to make that pass next to impossible to complete.

(Maybe if he didn’t say what he said things would be different. Maybe she wouldn’t have gotten into that car.)

His lungs start to ache as his breathing picks up in time with his racing heart. The sudden panic associated with the sight of their safety and linebackers rushing towards him make his head feel dizzy.

(Maybe she could finally give him answers.)

He narrowly ducks a player diving at him and loses his footing.

(Maybe she would still be alive.)

He turns and sees a flash of burning red hair in the crowds before he feels more than hears the crunch of helmet against his ribs. The wind is knocked completely out of his chest, his arms thrown forward
as the football goes tumbling out of his grasp.

His head connects roughly with turf as a second wave of air is forced out of his lungs due to the pressure of a large linebacker on his chest.

He blinks his eyes a few times to try and remain conscious.

(He could still be alive if it wasn’t for him. Him, him, him.)

He lies there on the ground, not even bothering to get up and try to scramble for the ball. From the sound of the booing and screaming in the crowd, the other team has most likely retrieved the ball.

The whistle blows for the end of the play and Jake jogs over to help pull him up.

When he goes to the sidelines their coach pulls him out of the game and subs in the back-up quarterback, the rest of their team looking at him with thinly covered shame.

He throws off his helmet and drops to the bench.

(He doesn’t really blame them.)

-----

The clock runs out and just like that the game is over.

The bleachers are fairly subdued - a loss by this much isn’t much to celebrate about - and Danny watches as the two teams congregate onto the field to shake hands.

All except for Kirsch. He’s walking away from the players and she can see the coach go after him with an arm reached out to grab his shoulder. Kirsch roughly shrugs the arm off and she can see him yelling. The coach screams a few things back and points towards the locker room.

Kirsch shakes his head and turns to walk away, but not before reaching up and pulling off the black armband he wore over his jersey for the whole game and throwing it to the ground.

When he’s off the field Danny suddenly stands. She hovers there for a moment before she realizes that she doesn’t really have a plan of what to do next.

(He honestly doesn’t even know why she wants to go down there, to be honest.)

She can feel Carmilla’s questioning eyes on her and she just takes a deep breath, “Well, it’s been fun. I’m gonna go.”

“Oh no. You’ll be sorely missed.”

She doesn’t justify that with a reaction, instead moving quickly through the crowds and away from the tugging feeling in her chest.

Her body is telling her to run onto the field and pick up that stupid piece of fabric but she wills herself to go in the opposite direction.

(This isn’t any of her business. She has no right getting involved in something she knows so little about.)

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“God, can you believe how shitty that game was? I almost feel embarrassed for them.”

Danny laughs with the other two girls. After the game finished - a pathetic 3 to 38 loss that even has Danny cringing - she left to meet up with a few Summer Society girls.

(There is only so much Carmilla she can take without wanting to rip out her hair.)

They hung out by the bleachers for an hour until Maya suggested that they all go back to her place for a movie marathon. The girls split up so they could go into different cars and Danny decides to hitch a ride with Rachel and Christine.

(They gossip a lot less than the others. Or, at least she thought they did.)

Rachel turns to her, “It was a good laugh, at least.” She scrolls through her phone and laughs, showing them a photo of the football team from Instagram with the caption Captain Fumbles.

“Dan, looks like your nickname is catching.”

Danny frowns, “That’s not that funny.”

Christine laughs, “You literally went into the game today making bets on how many fumbles he was going to make before the game was done.”

“Yeah, well,” she bristles as she thinks back to the look on Kirsch’s face when the game ended and he stormed off the field, “Whatever.”

They pass the locker rooms and there’s a loud banging coming from inside. Danny has a bit of an inkling as to what it is and makes a quick decision, “Hey, how about I meet you guys at Maya’s in a little bit? I just forgot I had to grab some stuff from my locker.”

The girls wave her off as they continue down the hall and she takes a deep breath before opening the doors to the locker room.

The rough sounds of the pounding of skin against a punching bag continue to get louder as she navigates deeper into the room.

Once she’s past the showers and a few rows of lockers she can see him, punching into the bag with something that surpasses any kind of normal workout regimen. Kirsch is out of uniform and in baggy gym clothes, continuing to hit the bag with harder force at each new punch.

Danny hesitates at the edge of the room, clearing her throat, “Uh, hey.”

He turns to her in a flash, his eyes bloodshot and red-rimmed. He takes in a few quick breaths, and self-consciously wipes at his face, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

She holds her hands up, “Woah, I just heard what sounded like someone getting beat to a pulp and came to make sure y-” she runs a hand through her hair, “I just wanted to make sure whoever was in here was okay.”

He barks out a laugh, “Well, looks like I’m fine, doesn’t it?”

She clamps her mouth shut, discomfort settling deep in her stomach at the burning rage lit up behind his eyes, “Kirsch-”

“Will you just leave?”
Danny steps forward, “I knew her, too, okay? Obviously not as well as you, but, you know, if you need to talk or anything,” she trails off and shrugs her shoulders helplessly because - well, there is no helping this situation.

(Some things in life just aren’t fair. Some things in life can’t be changed.)

“Don’t. Just-" he shakes his head and wipes at his face again, “I’m not doing this. Especially not with you.”

She frowns, “I know we’re not close, but-”

“Not close?” Another humourless laugh erupts from his throat and Danny takes a step back when he walks towards her, “We aren’t even friends, remember? You said so yourself.”

“Don’t be stupid. That doesn’t mean anything right now. Not today.”

“But that’s just it, isn’t it? I’m just so stupid, right?” He turns back towards the punching bag and throws in a few more hits, “It’s just who I am. So stop pretending like you give a shit about me. Because you’re always going to be the stuck-up arrogant bitch who hates me and I’m always going to be the dumb fucking piece of shit who just-”

Another hard hit.

“Let-”

And another.

“Everyone-”

A grunt cracks from his chest as his knuckles pound the bag and he collapses against it, “Down.”

Danny closes her eyes, the sight of him so vulnerable sending conflicting feelings to bottom of her chest.

“Kirsch.”

She opens her eyes and his back is still to her, his arms more reminiscent of hugging the bag now than using it just for support. She takes a few hesitant steps forward, lowering her voice as she hovers behind him, “Listen to me.” He makes no sign of moving or speaking so she continues, “Today was just a game, okay? It doesn’t matter who won or how you played.”

He turns so quickly that she almost stumbles backwards. There’s no denying the redness of his eyes now that she’s so close.

(They’re shining and it cracks something in her chest.)

“You don’t get it. You just don’t fucking get it. It’s not the game or the score or my embarrassing performance.”

“Then what? What is wrong?”

“This is all I’ve got going for me!”

She releases a breath that was caught in the back of her throat, “Kirsch-”

“No, no,” he shakes his head and rubs at his face, “She was right, and I just - she would have
thought--” he looks at her with wide, desperate eyes and rushes out in the most broken tone she’s ever heard, “I’m just never going to be good enough.”

He crumples and she does the only thing that makes sense at the time. Going against every thought screaming in her head, she gives in to instinct and reaches up to wrap her arms around his neck.

He folds into her quicker than she expected. For all of his stature and large body, he actually feels smaller and more frail held in her arms. His chest heaves against hers and she just squeezes tighter, trying to slow her breaths and hope he starts to mirror the same.

He finally lets out a sob and she looks up to blink back tears. She burrows her face into his neck, sucking in a ragged breath.

(It only seems to weigh her down further. The air is just entirely too heavy right now.)

When she pulls back a little she leans into his ear, “Win or lose, you still went out and played. And on a very difficult day for you,” she pauses, “No matter what, she would have been proud of you for that.”

The words act like repellant because he roughly pushes her off like he’s been hit with a bucket of ice water.

“Danny, you can’t fucking-” he wipes at his eyes and looks at her with a newly ignited fire, “I don’t deserve to hear-” he sucks in a breath, “Just - not from you-”

His tone is laced with disgust and now she feels like the one doused in ice, “What? Is there something so inherently wrong with me comforting someone?”

“Just stay the fuck away from me, Lawrence.”

“You know what? Fuck you, Kirsch.”

He shakes in frustration and lunges forward before turning and punching a dent straight into the locker a few spots away from her. She’s frozen in place, air coming out of her lungs in short gasps.

“Fuck,” he’s shaking his hand and she can already start to see the blood dripping from his knuckles and onto the floor, “fuck, fuck, fuck.”

She locks her jaw, “You deserve that.”

He ignores her, taking a seat on the bench and trying to flex his hand. She can see that he’s struggling - absolutely no where near able to move it - and despite her better judgment she takes a seat beside him.

“Let me see.”

“Fuck you.”

“Let me see, you fucking moron.”

The sense of familiarity must be what snaps him out of it because he rolls his eyes and then wordlessly hands over his arm, turning his head to avoid her gaze.

She delicately holds his arm over her knee, careful to keep it palm down to minimize the amount of blood she’ll get on her jeans. There are three deep cuts and the bruises are already starting to form.
She glances at his other hand and confirms that the one in hers is already twice the normal size. She gently grazes her fingertips over the skin of his knuckles and he winces, sucking in a deep breath.

“Okay, let’s go.”

He turns to her, “I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“Oh? Really? So you’re going to just get into your truck and magically drive yourself home with a hand in that condition? Good fucking luck with that, buddy.”

His jaw is set and he stares her down. After a few moments he gulps and won’t avoid her stare, “I’ll figure it out.”

She rolls her eyes, “Give me your keys. I’ll drive you to the hospital.” He goes to open his mouth but she shakes her head, “Just fucking do it before I change my mind. I can even just drop you off at the goddamn steps and we can pretend this never happened if it will get this over with faster.”

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his keys, thrusting them into her hand. They get up and he uses his other hand to grab his gym bag and throw it over his shoulder. He runs a hand over his face one last time and stops to stare at her.

“Listen-”

She holds up her hand, “Nope. Don’t say anything. I’m already going to start pretending this never happened.”

He almost frowns and in good faith with this plan she throws that in the compartmentalized images that she’s already starting to forget.

(Today’s a day for second chances. It doesn’t mean she needs to like it.)

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Carmilla walks along the perimeter of the school for the fourth time in the past hour, letting the sounds of the Black Keys fill her ears. When the game finished she got a text from Will telling her that he wasn’t going to be home tonight because of some Zeta thing he was going check out.

That was incentive enough for her to stay put and become a nomad of the school grounds until she decides to make the dreaded trek back home.

(Is it possible to be a wandering nomad forever?)

She was kind of hoping to run into Laura after the game but the band geeks looked like they were quickly packing up their stuff and heading into the school before the rest of the crowd could get to them.

She sighs. Guess she’ll have to wait until Monday.

Or not.

As she turns the corner to the parking lot she can see Laura sitting by herself on the curb by the road. Her back is towards her, but Carmilla knows that it’s her.

(She recognizes that shade of hair anywhere. She dreams about it way too much not to.)

She pulls out her earphones and tucks her phone back in her pocket as she approaches her, “Fancy
“meeting you here.”

Laura turns to her in surprise and then twists it into pure happiness. She scrambles up from the curb and looks like she’s going to burst with excitement; before Carmilla can do anything about it she has all 5’2” of the girl wrapped around her neck, “Thank you so much for coming today.”

She stills, not because she isn’t enjoying the hug, but because Laura is simultaneously pressing into all the right and wrong spots.

(They’re the wrong spots because they’re still tender and bruised. They’re also the right spots because Carmilla is just realizing now that she’s finally found something worth bearing through the pain.)

“It was no big deal.”

She still hasn’t managed to hug her back and Laura pulls back, arms still held loosely around her shoulders, “Sorry, but I told you I’m a hugger.”

She can’t resist the shining smile Laura is giving her and she rolls her eyes before stepping forward and wrapping her arms around Laura’s waist, allowing herself to burrow into her neck. The smell of that shampoo sets off an automatic response in her body, her heart racing promptly in response.

Laura is surprisingly the one to pull back, “What are you doing tomorrow night?”

“I don’t know - why don’t you tell me?”

Laura giggles. Carmilla’s heart soars. “Want to come over for a sleepover?”

“Sure.”

“Yes?” Laura raises her eyebrows, “That’s it?”

Carmilla shrugs, “Yeah.”

Laura squints at her, “No snarky response?”

She swats at her, “No.”

Laura crosses her arms, “Wow. I didn’t think I would live to see the day.”

“Like I said earlier today: if you want something, all you have to do is ask.”

Laura’s smile is dangerous and Carmilla knows she’ll regret saying that somewhere down the line. (She should probably already start regretting it, but she’s hopeless against those eyes.)

Laura glances at her phone and Carmilla gives her a playful tap on the arm, “Waiting for your dad?”

She nods, “Yeah. He was supposed to pick me up a while ago but he got held up at the station.”

“Hmm,” Carmilla considers her options and proceeds before she loses her nerve, “Well, it’s kind of nice out tonight. Are you up for a walk to Taco Bell?”

Laura laughs, “I’m not really that hungry, but I don’t mind sitting there and watching you stuff your face with a bunch of those crunch wraps you won’t shut up about.”
“They’re honestly the world’s best gift to man and I will die by that statement.”

Laura can only laugh in response, pulling out her phone and presumably shooting off a text to her dad letting him know where she’s going to be.

(It isn’t the wandering life of a nomad, but she has Laura by her side, and that’s all that matters.)

-----

“Oh my God, Kirsch!”

Kirsch’s mom rushes towards him, her eyes widening at the sight of his hand. Danny just lingering behind him. She wanted to drop him off at the curb but saw he was struggling with his gym bag, so she got out of the truck with a sigh and brought it up to the front porch. They were arguing over whether it would have been a better idea to go straight to the hospital when his mom burst open the door.

“Don’t just stand there - get inside this house right now!”

Kirsch huffs, “Mom, I’m fine. Honestly.”

“You’re going to be bleeding all over my carpet is what you are.” She gives him a stern look, “To the kitchen. Now. I’ll go grab my first-aid kit.”

Kirsch reluctantly walks past the threshold and stalks towards the kitchen, the front screen door closing behind him. Danny hovers awkwardly on the porch, Kirsch’s truck keys still in her hand. She could slip inside and set them down somewhere out in the open but then - can she just leave? She could always just leave them right there on the porch, but then anyone could just take them, so-

“Honey, are you coming inside or just going to stand out there all day?”

Danny looks up in surprise at Kirsch’s mom who’s staring at her with a raised eyebrow. She has the door open ajar and is looking at her expectantly.

“Uh, hi,” She smiles and steps forward, reaching out to shake her hand. She passes her the keys, “These are Kirsch’s, but I should get going. Nice to meet you Mrs...Kirsch.”

His mom laughs, “You can just call me Beyonce. To avoid any confusion.”

Danny slowly smiles, “Um. Okay.”

“Mom,” Kirsch is standing in the kitchen entranceway with a scowl, “Would you stop doing that with people?”

“What?” His mom looks between the two of them, “It’s my name!”

“Mom it’s not, oh my God.”

Danny lets out a laugh at the the growing smile on his mom’s face with every groan he gives in response.

(He is making a very good case in the side of nurture in the nature vs. nurture debate because her hatred towards Kirsch’s is clearly not genetic.)

“Come on, dear, come in.” Before Danny can protest she’s being pulled inside. This doesn’t do anything to dissipate the awkwardness she’s feeling because she’s essentially moved between
hovering on the porch to hovering in here.

Kirsch’s mom ushers her towards the kitchen and she takes a seat opposite the mini triage centre she’s set up in the middle of the table.

“I didn’t catch your name, dear.”

“Oh,” she chastises herself for her lack of manners, “It’s Danny.”

A look passes across his mom’s face and she gives Kirsch a look, “Ah, I see.”

Before Danny can analyze that glance Kirsch speaks up, “My mom’s real name is Barb, by the way.”

“-but you can just refer to me as Bey.”

“Mom, I swear to God.”

His mom sits down and grabs his hand a little too quickly, prompting him to wince. She turns back towards Danny, “Anyway, it was very nice of you to drive my son home. I can’t imagine the kind of Hell he would have gone through trying to drive that monster truck of his home in a state like this.”

“I said the very same thing to him at school,” she licks her lips, “Bey.”

His mom grins at her in response and Danny feels satisfied when she sees the look of annoyance etched onto Kirsch’s face.

Kirsch mumbles a bit under his breath and his mom continues to tend to his wound, “So, I haven’t seen you around here before, Danny. Are you a new friend of Kirsch’s?”

Well that’s a loaded question. Danny goes to open her mouth but Kirsch interrupts her.

“Uh, yeah,” he looks up and locks eyes with Danny, “She is.”

She offers him a small smile and he lights up in return. They don’t really do apologies, but this is the closest thing they’re going to get to one.

(She’s learning that sometimes a true break needs to occur before any real healing can start to begin.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 8, or the one where Laura and Carmilla have the gayest sleepover of all time. Also there's dogs. So many dogs. Not at the sleepover, but there's dogs.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings: Racism & Misgendering

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Laura (7:13am): morning!

Laura (7:23am): what do time do you want to come over?

Laura (7:33am): i was thinking 4pm

Carm (10:08am): works for me

Laura (10:09am): great! hope it doesnt rain...

Carm (10:12am): why?

Laura (10:13am): its a surprise ;)

LaFontaine is in the middle of concocting a truly horrible calculus pun to make this sheet of homework a little more tolerable when they hear a knock on the door. They look up from their mess of a desk to see their mother poking her head through their doorway.

“Susan, sweetheart? We’ve got somebody we’d like you to meet.”

We? ‘We’ is never good. Even when ‘we’ means their Dad, and especially when it doesn’t, ‘we’ is never good.

Pre-Calculus actually looks like the more desirable option all of a sudden. “Who is it?”

Their mother makes herself comfortable against the doorway. “Well, I was just having this lovely get together with Lisa-”

“Lisa? You hate Lisa. You talk about her behind her back like, every single day. Without fail.”

Their mother gapes at them. “I do not-”

“Or are you forgetting the fact that you’re extremely racist?” It’s a bit of a low blow, but it’s true.
Very true, and LaFontaine has been on edge for days, so it’s not really their fault if they feel like picking a few fights.

It’s better than the alternative.

Their mother sighs. “Oh, honey, that’s all behind us now. It was just a silly judgement I made about her family.” She puts her hands on her hips when LaFontaine shakes their head. “And it had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that they’re... African American.” She whispers the last words like they’re slurs.

That’s not to say that she ever has any trouble using actual slurs.

“It really was, though. I remember what you said-”

“Now, why do you have to make everything so difficult?”

LaFontaine clenches their jaw.

“All I came to tell you was that we were having a lovely little get together and she brought her son by to meet you. I think it would be a good idea.”

Uh oh. Yeah, they know what that means. It’s written all over their mother’s face.

“You know, Mom, I’m actually really busy right now-”

“I don’t want to hear it. I want you downstairs right now, young lady.”

Their fists clench and press into their knees. After a deep breath, they nod.

She goes downstairs first and LaFontaine follows reluctantly after.

There’s a mirror on the wall between the hallway and the staircase, and LaFontaine stops for a moment to address their look. They can’t possibly look that attractive to the average teenage boy. Black skinny jeans, a beat up pair of combat boots, and a jean vest over a white t-shirt. Messy, unkempt hair. Not even a trace of make-up. Perry loves this kind of look as much as they do, and that’s usually all that matters.

But right now, only one thing really matters: turning off teenage boys.

Luck isn’t on their side. The boy is standing in the foyer when they skip the last step on the staircase.

He breathes a sigh of relief almost immediately, his face morphing into an eager smile. “Hey. I’m JP. It’s nice to meet you.”

Uh oh. This is bad. This is bad, this is so bad. “Um, LaFon- Susan. Susan LaFontaine.”

“Right. Your mom was just telling me all about you.”

“It’s one of their argumentative days because they feel the urge to inform him that no, actually, my Mom pretty much knows nothing about me. It’s nice to know that you know all about the daughter she doesn’t actually have, though.

JP is looking at them like he’s just won the lottery and their stomach turns. This is all kinds of bad news.

His mom, Lisa, puts a hand on his shoulder. She’s at least an entire foot shorter than JP, but the
resemblance is definitely there. “Why don’t you two kids go for a walk?”

“Um, I actually-”

JP nods, and now they’re trapped. “That sounds like a great idea.” Really trapped. He swings open the door. “After you?”

There’s not even an option of backing out at this point, but at least he seems friendly. They’d rather explain to him that they aren’t interested than to their parents. “Um, yeah, I guess.”

The door shuts behind them and LaFontaine takes tentative steps off of their porch. There’s really no polite way to start this kind of conversation.

(Um, hi, so it’s actually a really funny story. We’re probably gonna laugh about it one day. I mean, hey, we might even be able to laugh about it right now. But uh, anyway, I’m like massively queer and in love with my best friend. Please don’t try to date me.)

JP is the first to speak. “Please tell me you’re gay.”

Blood rushes to their face about a hundred times faster than they ever thought was possible. And that’s actually saying a lot. LaFontaine has studied biology. Extensively. They know how blushing works, they have a basic understanding of the Autonomic Nervous System. But this really has to be some kind of record.

Where are those guinness world record people when they’re really needed?

Their first course of action is to make sure they didn’t just say that out loud, and thankfully, no. Their mouth is still clamped shut. Unlike JP’s, because once he starts talking there isn’t an end in sight.

They manage to get out a “What?”

JP ushers them down the sidewalk until they’re far enough away to be out of sight from the living room window and launches into his plea. “I’m sorry, I am. I hate stereotyping people, because I get stereotyped all the time and it’s really awful and I’ve just gotta apologize upfront for this, alright? But it’s just, it’s the way you dress and your hairstyle and your like, totally obvious disinterest in me, just-Please tell me you’re gay. This has gotta be something like the 9th blind date I’ve been forced into in the past two weeks.” The desperation on his face is clear. It’s even a little funny. “Please be gay,” he repeats and it strikes LaFontaine as absolutely hilarious because how often do they really get to hear the words please be gay?

They smile. “You can relax, I’m not into you.”

The tension slips out of his shoulders all at once. “Thank God. Not that I’m not into you, it’s not you specifically, I just-”

“Are you gay?”

“No.” He’s at least a foot taller than them, if not more, but he shoves his hands into his pockets and suddenly he looks so small. “No, I think I’m bisexual?”

The relief they feel hits them all at once. LaFontaine still hasn’t exactly figured out the science behind the feeling they get when they meet more people who aren’t straight. All they know for sure is that the world feels just a little safer.

"I haven’t really put a lot of thought into it," He continues. "It actually doesn’t even matter."
“Why not?”

He runs his hand along someone's white picket fence as they continue down the sidewalk. “I just don’t do the whole romance thing. I’ve never been into it. Everybody wants me to be into it, my Mom’s been talking about my future wife since I was four years old.” He shrugs. “I don’t even want a wedding. I can’t see myself being a boyfriend.” JP shakes his head. “You probably think I’m a little weird.”

LaFontaine takes a glance at his x-men converse, untucked button-up shirt, tie, and blue jeans combination and nods. “I think you’re very weird. But I also think you’re just very aromantic.”

“Is that even a thing?”

They nod. “Yeah, it’s totally normal. Like asexual but the opposite. Sort of.”

“Can you get treated for it?”

Their heart breaks when they think back to the time Perry had asked them the exact same question.

LaFontaine shakes their head and kicks a rock as they walk. “No. You don’t need to get treated for it. It’s like not liking ice cream. There’s always gonna be people who are a little confused, ‘cause sometimes the world just sort of is that way. Which sucks, by the way. Nobody should judge anybody for not liking ice cream. Because it’s not something you can change. So, you shouldn’t feel like you have to.”

JP stops walking when they’re in front of a house. His house, they remember, from a number of neighborhood potlucks they’ve been forced into.

“Alright, I take it back.” JP smiles at them.

“Take what back?”

“The wedding thing, I take it back. I might just have to marry you now, ‘cause you’re the first person in years to not just assume I’m gay.”

LaFontaine grins. “Sorry, man. I’m taken.”

A look of recognition crosses his face. “Somebody definitely likes ice cream.”

They think of Perry tucking a strand of hair behind her ear while she reads something out of a textbook. It’s one of hundreds of memories they have of Perry being effortlessly beautiful. “Can’t get enough.”

“Alright, well I can already tell from that smile on your face that she’s a special girl. Did I get it right? Is it a girl?”

“Yeah.” They bite their lip and lean up against the fence of his front yard. “Yeah, she’s a girl. And special doesn’t even begin to describe her, JP.”

- 

Laura (12:45pm): are you allergic to anything?

Carm (12:52pm): boy bands.

Laura (12:52pm): haha.
Laura (12:53pm): no i meant food

Carm (12:54pm): no im not allergic to anything

Laura (1:22pm): do you like magazines? they promote gross standards of beauty and unrealistic idealistic expectations on women and young girls that help to encourage low self-esteem

Laura (1:22pm): but like if you enjoy reading them I can get my dad to grab a few from the convenience store before you come over

Carm (1:25pm): i think ill pass

“Dude. Red or black?” Jake holds up two ties to the light blue dress shirt he’s wearing.

Kirsch looks up from the pile of clothes they’re hoarding on the seat of the fitting room. “Red.”

From the other side of the room he hears Ryan, “Definitely red.”

“Those are two different shades of blue, they’d totally clash.”

Jake nods. “You’re totally right.”

Ryan claps Jake on the back “You should get a white shirt to go with the blue tie, though.”

He smiles and Kirsch hears Will laughing from the corner, where he’s been messing with his phone for the last ten minutes. “Let me guess, Sam likes you in blue?”

Jake doesn’t have to say anything for Kirsch to already know the answer to that one, it’s a resounding yes. He shakes his head. “Dude this isn’t about scoring a date. It’s a pride thing.”

Ryan nods. “Zeta pride.”

Kirsch finds the shirt he was looking for, a black button up. “It’s tradition, bro.” He takes off his blue and red plaid and notices Will put his phone away.

“So, can I just wear whatever?”

Kirsch slips his arms through the sleeves of the shirt and he already knows this one’s gonna be pricy. The fabric feels really nice. “Dude, no. You gotta look sharp. I keep forgetting you’re just a freshman. We do it every year. The Zetas were founded on September 30th in like, 1990-whatever.” He starts to button up his shirt.

Ryan speaks up. “’94, I think.”

"Yeah. So, we dress up, we look good, it’s a pride thing. And I haven't seen a single Zeta drop the ball the whole time I’ve been here, so don’t screw it up, alright?"

Will shrugs and starts to go through the stack of clothes they’ve collected in the dressing room.

Ryan holds up a few bowties to his neck, inspecting them in the mirror. "This is like, the best day of the year, man. The chicks never see it coming. Last year I got like, five phone numbers by third period."
Kirsch looks between the red and purple tie he had added to the pile. He slips on the purple tie. "Dudes, I look hot. Jake back me up here, do I look hot?"

Jake looks up from where he was trying on a pair of shoes. "You look hot."

"Sweet."

Ryan takes off his shirt and tries on a new one.

"I wish those bitchy Summer Soc girls did a dress up like this." He says before Kirsch can even open his mouth to tell him that his dark gray shirt totally clashes with his khaki pants.

"They’re not all bitchy." Kirsch loosens his tie a bit, he can never get it on right. It’s always either too loose or too tight.

"I mean, I’m just saying like, the cheerleaders dress up sometimes, but the Summer Society are all jock girls. They might be bitches, but I’d still kill to see that tall redhead chick in one of those nice little tight dresses-"

"You know she'd probably kill you if she heard you say that," Kirsch says. He takes off the purple tie and replaces it with the red one.

"Please. Like some girl could take me." Ryan gestures to himself in the mirror.

He can’t pick between the red and the purple tie, so he throws them both in the ‘yes’ pile. He’ll decide later. Kirsch starts to unbutton his shirt and fakes a laugh. "Danny Lawrence could take you in a heartbeat."

(So, that probably wasn’t a sentence he should have said in a room with three Zetas, because Will and Jake are already exchanging uneasy glances. And Ryan looks angry. Whatever. It’s the truth. He knows it’s the truth.)

"Bro, since when do you call her Danny?"

He’s got him there. Kirsch doesn’t even have an answer because the truth is, he can’t remember when that started.

"Dude, it doesn’t matter. Danny, Psycho Society, whatever you wanna call her. I’m just saying. She’d kick your ass."

(Ryan really doesn't need to know that he'd already changed her name in his phone from ‘Summer Psycho’ to ‘Danny’. Even though it’s actually a chill thing to do, all things considered. She’s like, a total bitch sometimes, but when the chips are down, she’s kinda like a bro.

And he could sorta use one.)

"Whatever, man."

Will pulls a wrinkled shirt from the bottom of the pile. "Would something like this work? I have a shirt just like it at home."

Ryan cringes. "Dude, its pink."

Jake looks a little offended but shakes his head. "No, that’s salmon, bro."

He and Ryan look at it together. Kirsch can’t tell the difference, but he’s itching to disagree with
Ryan right now so he nods. “Yeah. Totally salmon.”

That seems to satisfy the pink-averse Ryan. "Oh, cool."

Kirsch strips the dress shirt off his back and starts to fold it. “Why do you even have a dress shirt? You’re like fourteen.”

He shrugs. "My mom has a lot of lame office parties at our house, I’ve got a bunch of dress clothes for that kind of stuff."

Will looks a little flustered when Jake throws an arm around his shoulder. "Bro, you just said the magic words. Can I borrow a tie, then? These are expensive."

He swallows and awkwardly ducks out from underneath Jake. "Yeah, I’ll bring you one, just text me what color you need."

Kirsch picks up his plaid shirt from the back of a chair and slips it on. “So dude, what’s the deal with your sister?"

Will frowns. "What do you mean?"

“She's like. Kind of a bitch? But she's super nice to Laura." Kirsch says before he looks down and realizes he’s still wearing the dress shoes he picked. He eyes the triple digit price tag and suddenly decides to just wear last year’s shoes.

“Who's Laura?"

"She hasn't mentioned her? Laura's the really short hottie in the marching band. We’ve seen her at practice, she’s like a total babe.” He kicks off the dress shoes and slips into his Vans. “Anyway, whatever, they like, hang out now I guess. So I thought, cool, maybe she's warming up to people or whatever." He shrugs and sticks his hands in his pockets. "I saw her at the mall the other day, she wouldn't even look at me."

Will shrugs. "Don’t take it personally, Carmilla's always been like that. She and mother don't really get along well. I think she's planning on holding a grudge about it for at least another decade."

Yeah, Kirsch knows a little bit about that. Of all the people in his life, he never really expected to be able to compare Carmilla and Sarah.

"When Carmilla likes someone, she gets attached. It's all or nothing with her. I’m pretty sure she's only ever cared about two people in her life."

Nodding, Kirsch notices Ryan and Jake’s confused looks. “Yeah, that Ell chick you told me about, right? Who's the other one?"

He must have found a shirt he wants to try on, because Will pulls his t-shirt over his head. "Me."

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Laura (3:03pm): pizza or burgers?

Carm (3:05pm): for what?

Laura (3:05pm): dinner :)
JP’s house is smaller than LaFontaine’s, but it feels cozier. The colors are warmer, and most importantly: he has pets.

Three dogs meet them at the front door and by the time they’ve reached the kitchen, LaFontaine has seen at least two different cats.

JP swings open the refrigerator door. “Alright, I wouldn’t really call it a selection of drinks, but... Iced tea or Orange Juice?”

They laugh just as the biggest dog tries and fails to mount them. “Damn, we really do live in suburbia, huh?”

“Don’t remind me.”

“I’ll take the orange juice.”

He grabs them each a carton from the shelf and they make their way into the living room. He takes the chair and LaFontaine takes the couch with both cats and a full grown German Shepherd that is somehow under the impression that he’s a lapdog.

“Sorry, they’re a friendly bunch.”

“It’s fine, animals love me.” They scratch behind the chocolate lab’s ears with both hands. “And the feeling is definitely mutual, isn’t it buddy?”

The dog pants in response.

The smaller cat decides to cuddle into their lap as the bigger cats climbs up their arm to perch between their shoulder and the back of the couch. It’s ridiculous and completely unnecessary and probably uncomfortable. After a few moments, the cat squats, immobilizing them. Moving their neck means moving the cat, and that’s gotta be a felony.

“I love cats so much.”

“Alright, but you haven’t stopped smiling since you mentioned that girl, you’ve gotta tell me something about her.”

(In truth, they hadn’t even noticed how much they were smiling.)

“Are we alone?”

“Good question.” JP clears his throat and tilts his head upwards. “DAD? CAN I RECORD PROJECT RUNWAY OVER YOUR FOOTBALL GAME?” He waits through five seconds of silence before he nods. “Definitely alone. So tell me. What’s her name?”

“Perry. Well, Lola, actually. But everyone calls her Perry.” LaFontaine hesitates. Telling this story might be crossing into dangerous territory, but it’s just so Perry that they can’t resist. “In freshman year, I started going by my last name. For uh, for some personal reasons. It actually ended up causing this really stupid fight between us. Like, really stupid.” They focus on the juice carton in their hands,
rotating it, reliving that year. “She’s been my best friend since we were seven, but it got really shitty between us for a while. And a lot of that was because of me wanting to go by LaFontaine. And it wasn’t all her fault, there was a lot going on. But, once we apologized and got back together, and this was before we even started dating, mind you. I was in the lunch line, I think. And these two guys I was talking to asked me out of nowhere why I wanted to go by LaFontaine. I had no idea what to say and, well the first thing you’ve gotta know about Perry is she’s kind of incredible. She just slides right into the conversation and says ‘Oh, we both go by our last names. It was just a game we used to play as kids and I suppose it just stuck.’” The smile on their face is unstoppable as they execute the last few words. “‘Just call me Perry. This is LaFontaine’.”

The chocolate lab rests its head against LaFontaine’s knee, and if they didn’t know any better, they would think the dog was absolutely endeared by this story.

(They know they still are, years later.)

“It was freshman year, and I was kind of a loner before then so, barely anybody there even knows my birth name. Which is actually kind of incredible, considering my Mom works as an english teacher there.”

“Right, you don’t go to my school do you?”

“No, I transferred to Silas when Perry moved.” They cringe a bit when they feel whiskers brushing their neck.

(Not a great time to be both ticklish and a cat lover.)

“And let me tell you, I’m not religious or anything, but my Mom getting a job there the same year that Perry had to move to that district had to be some act of God. I’m not sure what I’d do if I had to go to a school without Perry.”

“So, wait.” JP shakes his head. “You’ve been with this girl since you were seven?”

“Yup.”

“How long has it been?”

“Nine years and ten months. Our friendship anniversary is in two months.”

JP scratches at the back of his neck. “Alright, damn, I’m impressed. I’ve gotta meet this girl one day.”

“I’d like that.”

Laura (3:25pm): do you have a ride or do you want my dad to pick you up?

Carm (3:25pm): I’m already on my way

Laura (3:26): k :

“I come bearing gifts.”

Laura cocks her head to the side and her jaw drops a little when she sees the cupcake that Carmilla is
holding out in front of her. Her hand slides down the side of the front door. “Oh, whoa, is that for me?”

“Mhmm.”

“Chocolate?”

“And peanut butter.”

Laura’s smile has a childlike quality to it, the kind of smile that makes Carmilla want to give her the stars. She settles for handing the best cupcake in the world - and this is a belief Carmilla takes very seriously. “Thanks, I mean- not thanks as in you made it for me thanks but like, thanks as in thanks for bringing it.” She shakes her head and gives Carmilla the space to step over the threshold. “Just, thanks.”

“Don’t mention it. There was a bakery on the way here, it was on sale.” Okay, half true.

“Did you walk here?”

Carmilla shrugs a shoulder. “It’s not that far.”

Laura shuts the door behind them. “By the way, bad news. The cable is out tonight so we can still watch movies on DVD but we won’t be able to watch Doctor Who.”

“So there is a God after all.” Carmilla gives her a lopsided smile. “Where’s your Dad?”

“He’s still at the store.”

(So there is a God, and he clearly has a very dark sense of humor.)

“We’re alone? I can’t imagine he likes that idea.”

Laura gapes for a second, then rolls her eyes. “No, it’s fine. We were alone last night.”

“He didn’t seem to like that very much.” She grips the strap of her backpack against her shoulder.

“I think he was objecting more to the fact that we walked half a mile to a Taco Bell at 11pm.” Laura wipes her hands on the side of her pants; dark brown capris to match her yellow tank top. “Here, you can just leave that on the stairs.” She takes the bag from Carmilla’s hands and hangs it on the post at the end of the steps.

“Aren’t we going upstairs?”

“Not yet. C’mon.” Laura tugs on Carmilla’s hand and leads her through the house to the back door, only stopping in the kitchen to pick up an outdated battery-operated CD player.

She lets Laura lead her, if only to allow herself the feeling of Laura’s hand in hers. Which is pitiful, but Carmilla has yet to find a single thing about this situation that isn’t.

“What are we doing?”

Laura drops her hand to set up the CD player and starts playing something that sounds suspiciously like Taylor Swift, but Carmilla doesn’t comment on it. Yes, they have a sort of unspoken rule that Laura won’t force her into a lesson in pop culture unless Carmilla has given her permission, but Carmilla doesn’t exactly have permission to be daydreaming about kissing her closest friend.
And that’s a rule she’s definitely made a habit of breaking.

With a hop off of the back porch and a gesture towards the trampoline in her backyard, Laura smiles. “Ta da.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows and sighs.

(It’s more out of habit than actual disdain. If she’s being honest, she’s always wanted to try out a trampoline.)

“C’mon, it’s super fun.”

It’s a small enough trampoline, one that was never meant for more than three people at a time. There’s a black and blue net surrounding it. “One question,” She says as she slips through the net. Laura trails behind her to zip up the entrance. “How many times did you have to fall before your Dad had to put up a safety net?”

“He just has... safety concerns.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes as they both slip their shoes off, tossing them over the net and onto the back porch.

Laura starts to jump before she does, and after a few hops Carmilla gives into the temptation. She flicks back her bangs before she starts to bounce across from Laura. Laura’s hair is doing a ridiculous bouncing motion that can only be described as flooping. Her shirt delays in mid-air for one too many seconds for it to be deemed fair, which Carmilla does her best not to get distracted by. It doesn’t really work and she finds out that Laura has a really nice stomach. (No bruises. No scars.)

Her own red plaid and black tank top combination is too tight to reveal anything, but that doesn’t stop Laura from staring at her. Carmilla doesn’t know what she’s looking for but she’s almost too happy to even worry about it.

It takes a few minutes of half-jumping, half-laughing for Laura to attempt a clumsy front flip and suddenly they’re close. Close and a little disoriented, because Laura reaches out to brace herself against Carmilla’s arms and neither of them have stopped jumping; clearly Laura doesn’t intend to stop anytime soon, because she clings to her for a few more bounces.

Which leads to Laura losing her footing.

Which in turn leads to Carmilla losing her footing.

Which leads to the dull thud that accompanies the sharp impact of her skull against what she can only assume is a metal pole with a vengeance. They both go down in a heap, Carmilla landing on top of Laura. Which would be about a thousand times hotter if she wasn’t clenching her teeth and trying not to cry out and yeah, that’s definitely going to be a bruise or a cut or-

“Blood. You’re bleeding. Oh my God, Carm, I’m so sorry. Oh crap, are you okay?” Laura grapples to sit up, sending Carmilla back. She manages to shift her weight before she can tip backwards and ends up essentially kneeling between Laura’s legs. Which she can just add to the growing list of things that would be significantly more exciting if she wasn’t actually bleeding on her crush’s stupid trampoline.

Crush. Ew.
Carmilla used to hate the idea of fixating on anybody like this, but she feels like her head has been cracked open and yet her first thought is still, unsurprisingly: Laura. Laura, who looks like she’s just run over a stray kitten in the road with the worried expression that’s painted across her face. This is probably the first time in Carmilla’s life that she’s found herself laughing through a head wound, but she can’t help it when she sees the shocked gape of Laura’s mouth. She looks more remorseful than anybody she’s ever seen, so Carmilla lies. “Don’t worry about it, I—” She shakes her head and fuck is that a bad idea. “I got hit with a... banjo the other day.”

“What?”

It’s not her best excuse, but it works to wipe the pitiful look off of Laura’s face and distracts her long enough so that Carmilla can discreetly sit back. Laura’s lap is not a great place for rational thought, as evidenced by the fact that she just tried to use a banjo as an excuse so that some ridiculously thoughtful girl wouldn’t feel so bad about hurting her.

(That thought alone shocks her system the second it crosses her mind.)

She looks down. “I work in a music shop,” Carmilla explains. “I was doing inventory and it slipped off the shelf. I just hit my head in the same place, I think. Hence the blood.”

“That sounds... painful.” Laura says with a cringe. “Are banjos heavy?”

“Very.” She meets Laura’s eyes for a moment before dropping her head in her hands to cradle the wound at the edge of her hairline. “This isn’t your fault, though.”

“I’m still sorry.” She feels a hand on her arm. “Does it hurt?”

“She feels rattled and her head is throbbing and it’s not one of the worst head wounds she’s had - she’s had two concussions before - but it definitely fucking feels like it.

And there’s blood dripping down the side of her face. Which is probably just really attractive.

Laura pulls her up from where she’s kneeling, holding her up by her elbows, and Carmilla Karnstein is not one to milk an injury, she never has been. But she might just be willing to bend that rule for a few minutes because Laura’s thumb is stroking her upper arm and she’s helping her off the trampoline and yeah, it’s not the worst thing in the world to be taken care of.

“We should probably clean you up before my Dad gets home and tries to drive you to the emergency room.”

“Good plan.”

Care Perr (4:22pm): Sorry I've been so busy today. My Dad was actually home so he's had me watching movies with him all day

Care Perr (4:22pm): I missed you

Care Perr(4:24pm): <3

Care Perr(4:28pm): we're watching another movie right now but I can't stop thinking about you

My Person <3 (4:29pm): is the main character extremely good looking by any chance?
Care Perr (4:29pm): devastatingly so.

My Person <3 (4:30pm): then im not surprised :)

My Person <3 (4:26pm): i've been thinking about you all day too

Care Perr (4:31pm): what have you been up to? hopefully something more interesting than hours
of watching monty python

My Person <3 (4:44pm): it was pretty boring over here too

My Person <3 (4:44pm): also

My Person <3 (4:44pm): im offended

My Person <3 (4:44pm): monty python is amazing

Okay, hop up." Laura pats the kitchen counter next to the stove and turns around, rifling through a
drawer. Carmilla does as she's told. She watches from the countertop as Laura pull out a first aid kit,
and it's significantly more organized than her own because the band-aids are sorted by color.

She wets a towel, turns to face her, and frowns. With a clumsy few kicks, Laura moves the stepping
stool from in front of the refrigerator to the spot in front of Carmilla and mounts it so they're eye to
eye.

"Shut up, you're short too."

Carmilla grins. "I could have stayed standing."

She ignores that and presses the towel into Carmilla's forehead. "Oh God, wow, it's still bleeding.
That must have been one hell of a banjo."

Carmilla doesn't say anything, she doesn't trust herself to when Laura is inches from her face, her
tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth as she wipes away the blood from her hair with a
towel. At some point she dips it in alcohol because Carmilla winces when she feels the familiar sting.

"Sorry."

"It's okay." Even her voice sounds different, uneasy, with Laura this close. She doesn't seem to
notice. Laura is focused, paying the kind of attention to her cut that Carmilla doesn't even bother to
pay to her worst injuries. She's so distracted that Carmilla gets a chance to do something she's wanted
to for a few days now.

She counts Laura's freckles. There are 19 of them, most on the left side of her face.

Laura puts some kind of pain relief gel on the cut, and she really needs to get her hands on whatever
she's using because it works miracles. The pain dulls to a numbing throb, but it does nothing to clear
the cloud around her thoughts. She puts a band-aid over the cut once it's stopped bleeding and
presses an ice pack against her forehead. Which is close to useless, Carmilla knows this. Ice packs
have virtually no effect on cuts or blood, they're a placebo at best. But Laura's effect on her is
significant, and it's powerful. Laura can't possibly know what she's feeling, but she must know about
the ice pack because she shrugs like she knows its next to worthless.

"My Dad always does this when I get hurt."

Laura offers her an encouraging smile, the kind Carmilla used to give Will when he scraped up his knee on that stupid bicycle he refuses to give up, no matter how old and falling apart it is. It's the same kind of smile Carmilla gave to Skylar when she realized who was letting him go hungry. It's the same kind of smile that her fourth grade teacher had given her when she showed up to class covered in bruises with a story about the next door neighbors who had decided she was their new punching bag.

She hadn't appreciated the sympathy then, and she's not sure she appreciates it now. Because it's different. Because part of her does actually want to believe that Laura cares about her.

But that doesn't stop the feeling that it's just the exact same thing.

Carmilla doesn't get a chance to really consider it, she barely gets a chance to take in a breath - one she could really use right now - because Laura is pressing a kiss to her cheek and she’s not 100% percent sure about this, but Carmilla suspects the weight on her knee is Laura’s hand. Carmilla closes her eyes to take in the feeling of Laura’s lips against her cheek.

They’re soft.

It’s brief and it's chaste and it should be illegal in at least eight states because it's doing all kinds of damage to Carmilla's mental state.

Laura pulls back and meets her eyes. There's a nervous tension in them and Laura looks more surprised than she feels.

"Does your Dad do that?" Carmilla licks her lips and wills her thoughts to stop in their tracks, stop now, maybe even stop five minutes ago.

She doesn't get an answer because the door that leads to the garage swings open and Laura steps out from between Carmilla's legs to clean up the mess of first-aid supplies as her Dad comes through the door with groceries in hand.

"Hey, girls."

"Hey, Dad."

Carmilla nods at him and slides off the countertop. "Mark."

"I've got everything for dinner and about twenty-five different snacks." He drops the groceries on the kitchen table. "I wasn't sure which ones you preferred."

"I'll eat anything."

"Oh. Well in that case, you owe me 40 bucks, those were expensive."

Laura's eyes widen and she hits his side. "Your jokes aren't funny."

Much to Laura’s disappointment, they both laugh and she pouts.

Her Dad pulls a soda out of one of the plastic bags and slides it across the table to Carmilla. "I didn't get you a Pepsi this time, because I know you have no respect for the drink."
"Pepsi is an abomination in a bottle and it should never have been invented." She says as she twists the cap on her Dr. Pepper.

Laura nods and fishes her grape soda from the bag. "I'm with you there."

They smile at each other across the table.

It's these moments, the ones that are becoming more frequent by the day, that she remembers why she's cornered. She can't tell Laura. She can't kiss Laura. She can't lose Laura.

But she can't stop thinking about Laura.

Still, she isn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth, even if the horse is a beautiful girl who makes her feel like she deserves more.

She'll never deserve her, that's easy enough to come to terms with. But late nights on the couch, burgers on the back porch, inside jokes with her Dad. She's starting to feel like she could deserve this.

Danny has known Christine for two years now, but it’s taken her until this moment to resign herself to the fact that she’s just never going to get over the sheer size of her house. She runs her hand across the marble countertop in the kitchen while the girls talk in the living room.

Maya and Caroline are still in their bikinis, sharing a bowl of popcorn on a fluffy towel they’ve spread across the couch. Emma sits on the footrest, petting Christine’s overexcited border collie. The way he’s licking her face reminds Danny of the way her first boyfriend used to kiss, and that’s not even close to a compliment. Emma is still in her swimsuit, too. They’d gone swimming and Danny was the only one who had taken a shower because she’s a lot of things, but willing to pass up the chance to shower in a room that she could fit her living room into is not one of them.

She’s already changed back into her white shirt with the red sleeves and a pair of jean shorts. Danny grabs an apple on her way through the kitchen and then drops herself on the couch across from Emma. The apple is a short-lived meal, because Jasper, the lovable but greedy dog, has already taken it and started chewing before she can even reach out a hand to pet him.

“Thanks, buddy. It’s not like I didn’t want that. Brought it for you, obviously.”

Emma laughs and slides off her seat to kneel next to Jasper as he gnaws at the fruit. Her hands scratch behind his ears.

Danny feels her phone vibrate and breathes out a sigh of relief when she checks it and it’s not her parents.

Noah (8:12pm): hey asshole call me

Emma stops petting Jasper. “Is that Noah?”

Danny does her best not to cringe. “Yeah.”

“Has he asked you out yet?” She can feel the other girls staring at her, this kind of talk is catnip to them.

“Oh God, please don’t.”
“Why not? He’s cute,” Emma says. Christine and Maya nod and smile. Danny resists the urge to projectile vomit. Yes, he’s cute. He’s a little short for her, but he has really nice hair. His body is alright, as baseball players go. His sense of humor is all he really has going for him. But Danny can say this stuff about all her friends. Nothing about Noah Henson stands out. Except for the fact that he won’t stop flirting with her, and he won’t stop texting her, and he won’t stop calling her, and he won’t stop trying to show her the proper posture for throwing a goddamn frisbee in the park.

(Does he think she’s five? She’s perfectly capable of throwing a frisbee and the last thing she needs is another huge ego trying to establish his dominance over her like he’s pissing on a fence.)

“He’s not my type.”

Christine scoots closer. “Well, what does he want?”

(She knows what he wants.)

“He wants me to call him.”

The girls coo and Emma slaps her knee. “Well, go do it, idiot.”

Danny sighs and relents, sidestepping past Jasper and slipping out the sliding glass door. She does her best to ignore the way the girls have stopped talking and are focused on her through the living room window. She turns around and pulls out her phone, skipping past Noah’s number in her contacts and then scrolling back up. She clicks on a name and hits send before she can think about it.

She almost regrets it until she hears a “Hey.”

“Hey... How’s your... hand?”

There’s a pause and a chuckle. “Pretty beat up.”

“Did you break it?” She’s starting to realize small talk is both the best and worst thing in the world. It’s torture, but she feels less like an idiot for calling if there’s something to talk about.

“Nah, it’s just a bunch of stitches. It’ll be fine in a few weeks but, uh, I can’t play for a while. But my Mom thinks I’ll probably be healed up by the homecoming game if I don’t mess with it too much.”

Danny laughs. “You should probably listen to Beyonce.”

“Oh God, not you too. She’s gonna get a complex one of these days.”

“So, what is the team gonna do without you now? It’s gonna be hard to maintain a losing streak quite like this one.”

“Well, the first thing they’ve gotta find is another pretty face to get all the babes to come to the game.” That actually sounds like the Kirsch she’s used to and Danny finds herself smiling.

She makes sure to keep her back to the living room window. “Right. ‘Cause Lord knows they only come to see you play.”

She hears a shuffle on his end and she’s about to make another snarky comment or two when he talks again. “You came.”

It catches her off guard and she thinks back to Carmilla’s comment last night. Which breaks at least four of her rules because nothing Carmilla Karnstein ever says should be taken seriously. That’s a code she happily lives by.
“Well, I didn’t have anything better to do.”

“Oh. Why did you call tonight?”

“Do I need to have a reason to call?”

He pauses and she can picture him considering it. “No. But you have one, don’t you?”

She sighs. “I’m stalling. My friends think I’m calling this guy who keeps hitting on me and is apparently really bad at picking up on hints because I’ve literally never been less interested in a guy.”

“Hey, watch it. I could hang up, you know. Then how would you stall?”

She scoffs. “I’m perfectly capable of stalling all by myself, thanks.”

“Yeah, but you still called.”

He does have a point there. Danny doesn’t want to think about that too much, because that leads to thoughts that she is nowhere near ready to address. The guy had a rough day. He punched a locker. Anybody who resorts to punching inanimate objects deserves a little comforting. She wants to check up on him. She’s not heartless.

“Which means either A: you actually enjoy talking to me. Because on some level you know that I’m actually pretty chill.”

She shakes her head, fighting the smile on her face. “Don’t push it.”

“Or it’s B: you have a gun to your head, which is like. Less likely. ‘Cause if you did, you’d probably kick the guy’s ass.”

“Damn right I would.”

“Listen, I’m gonna do you a favor and not make you admit that it’s A so you don’t get hives or whatever. On one condition.”

“And what’s that?”

“Help me pick a tie.”

The burgers that Laura’s Dad makes probably qualify as the second best meal Carmilla has ever had. She eats two of them and shares the third with Laura, who gets so excited about the movie selection process - one that she says has to follow the system - that she lets her burger go cold on the paper plate between them. Laura doesn’t notice when Carmilla eats it, and more importantly, Mark never comments on it, which she’s grateful for. She hadn’t had a chance to eat lunch and these burgers are pretty incredible.

They watch two movies. One about an all-girl acapella group, and it’s not all that memorable with the exception of the shower scene, which had an incredible amount of wasted potential. Carmilla’s already forgotten about it by the time Laura switches the DVD and starts playing 50 First Dates. She remembers the name of this one, if only because of the sickening train of thought it sends her into:
How many first dates would she take Laura on if she couldn’t remember her?

(Too many to keep any remaining shred of dignity in her body, probably.)

But it’s a moot point. She doesn’t think about it again until Laura’s Dad goes to bed and they’ve moved from the living room to the basement. And then Laura’s sitting cross-legged beside her, pushing her hair back and pursing her lips and yeah, she’s thinking about it.

“So.” Laura chuckles in the awkward silence between them. “What do you wanna do now?”

Carmilla leans back against the arm of the couch to face her and Laura mirrors her position.

Laura twiddles her thumbs. “Are you tired yet?”

“No.” Carmilla briefly worries about what happens when she does get tired. When she goes to sleep next to Laura. There’s never been any way to guarantee which dreams will come to her at night.

Laura shifts to sit up. “Well, the way I see it, I’ve been making the activity choices all night so far. I think it’s only fair that you make some choices.”

Carmilla sits up too. “Oh, is that how it is?”

“That’s how it is.”

“Alright.” Carmilla licks her lips. She’s about to make a very bad decision. “Tell me something, what do you normally do at these sleepovers?” She tugs at her crossed ankles to have somewhere to rest her hands. “Play house? Prank call teachers?” A very bad decision, any second now. “Practice kissing?”

And there it is.

She’s testing her boundaries, but apparently she’s not the only one. Her heart starts to race when Laura meets her eyes.

“I have a feeling you don’t need much practice with kissing.”

She almost laughs - there’s absolutely no truth to that. “There’s no such thing as too much practice. Hasn’t your band instructor ever taught you that?”

Laura runs a hand through her hair and she really needs to stop doing that if she wants Carmilla’s heart to remain in the general vicinity of her chest.

“It’s not the worst idea in the world.”

“No?” She can feel her palms sweating; that’s getting dangerously close to a ‘yes’. She isn’t sure what she’s going to do if Laura agrees to this.

She shouldn’t have suggested it in the first place, but it’s too late now. Laura scoots closer. “I mean, you can’t exactly ask a boy to give you constructive criticism on your kissing skills. And that’s just another way that friendships between girls can be healthy and beneficial, since we could you know, provide each other with that safe space to, to... to experiment and um, learn.” Laura looks like she’s convincing herself more than Carmilla, and in truth, she is. Carmilla’s been convinced for at least two weeks.

“Unless that’s weird for you.”
It’s weird. It’s weird and the back of her neck is sweating and she’s nervous and she doesn’t know why, except she does, she absolutely does and that’s weird too.

“It’s not weird.”

It takes about ten seconds of pure tension for Laura to spring into action in a way that is just so Laura of her that Carmilla might have to kiss her.

Which is, apparently, the plan.

“Okay! Um, I’m gonna get us a notepad.” She files through the drawers on the wall of the basement while she gestures towards Carmilla. “And we can make some KWL charts.”

“Some what charts?”

“Aha!” She finds a clipboard in a drawer somewhere and snags a pen off the surface of the side table. “KWL Charts. We did one of the first day of Health class.” Laura makes no move to sit down, so Carmilla stands up and walks to her. If she’s actually going to do this - which she shouldn’t - she’s at least going to get it right. “You make the three columns, what you know, what you want to know, and what you... what you learned.”

Carmilla has a list. A mental list, of the things on this earth that have the potential to actually kill her. It’s a long list, one made up entirely of things Laura has done to her. A frequently updated list. A very dangerous list. A list that she can now add ‘licking her lips while staring at Carmilla’s lips from less than a foot away’ to.

She tries to be cocky - it’s supposed to be her thing. “You must be fun at parties.”

Laura rolls her eyes and shoves the clipboard into Carmilla’s chest. “Just shut up and make your chart so we can start kissing.”

This actually pulls a laugh from her. She doesn’t have anything resembling a comeback to that, but Laura doesn’t need one.

“Sorry. That was a bit aggressive.”

“You’re telling me, cutie.”

She adds the breathy laugh that follows to her mental list. *Who even is this girl?* Carmilla scribbles down the words ‘I’m gay’ and ‘I’m bored’ under the K column. Laura crosses her arms and raises her eyebrows at her until she writes ‘2 know if I’m a good kisser’ under the W column. Partly because she knows it’s what Laura wants to hear, and partly because it’s true.

She omits a lot of what she could write under this column.

“Alright, am I done yet or is there more paperwork to do?”

Laura has her eyes closed and she’s shaking her head and Carmilla knows what her next words are before she even says them.

“Is this silly? This is totally stupid, isn’t it? I’m sorry, I’m not sure what I was thinking, this is completely-”

Carmilla doesn’t even have a chance to figure out if she’s disappointed or relieved because there’s the sound of the basement door opening and she separates herself from a very flustered Laura just in
time to see Mark coming down the stairs. He’s in a t-shirt and pajama bottoms covered in cowboy hats.

He would be the type to wear funny pajamas.

“Laura, do you have any batteries?” He looks like he’s half-awake. “The emergency flashlight in my room stopped blinking. Is yours still working?”

“Um, yes! Yes, I- we have batteries, they’re in the-” Laura swings open a door of the entertainment center. “Right here.” She takes a handful, and she must hand him at least six more batteries than he actually needs because no flashlight on earth could possibly require ten AA batteries.

He frowns at the batteries and then frowns at Laura. “What were you girls doing?”

“We were just...” Laura looks up at her but she provides no answer. Her brain is still trying to work out whether or not there’s going to be kissing when he leaves the room. “Building a blanket fort. Just building a fort.”

Carmilla nods. “Yeah, a... fort.”

That works for him, because he shrugs and leaves them alone again. Laura’s shoulders slump when they hear the door shut. “Great. Now we have to actually build a fort.”

So that’s probably a ‘no’ on the kissing.

“You can’t be serious.”

She’s gonna end up getting whiplash from this girl.

Laura starts to gather the pillows and blankets from couch and the blow-up mattress she had set up for Carmilla on the floor. “Trust me, if he comes down here again and we’re not building a fort, he’s gonna get really suspicious.”

“Of what?” Something about that rubs her the wrong way, but she doesn’t let herself think about it long enough to understand why. “Does he think I’m going to try something?”

“What? No, of course not. He’d probably just worried that we’re on drugs or doing-” She shrugs and puts on her best imitation of him, “Whatever you crazy kids do these days for kicks.” Laura must see the look on her face, the one she really hopes doesn’t reflect what she’s feeling.

She feels shitty, plain and simple.

Laura drops the pillow she’s holding and grabs her wrist. “Hey, it’s not about you. My Dad loves you, he just always worries about that stuff. Even when LaFontaine and Perry stay the night.”

That actually does make her feel better, because Laura’s hand is still holding her wrist and she’s extremely grateful for the mental image of the ginger twins getting high - that’s a sight she’d kill to see.

“But, c’mon, you might actually love this. Blanket forts are awesome.” Laura picks up the pillows again and it takes about fifteen minutes of bossing Carmilla around to get a working fort situation. One consisting of: a card table, eight pillows, three blankets, a bean bag chair, her blow-up mattress, and two sleeping bags. All tucked into a corner of the basement.

She’s wearing thick eyeliner and combat boots and it isn’t until she helps Laura secure a blanket on
the edge of a bookcase that she realizes this might actually be the least punk rock thing she has ever
done in her life.

It’s a very specific process, she learns. Laura is all about maximizing possible fort space while
minimizing surface area. Fort building is evidently a science, and one Laura intends to master.

Carmilla thinks it’s probably the most comfortable thing she’s ever seen, and yeah, she’ll admit that.
What she won’t admit is the nervous tension in her chest when she lays down underneath the canopy
of sheets and pillows next to Laura. Laura, whose hand is touching the back of her own. Laura, who
can’t possibly have already forgotten that they had almost kissed just minutes ago. Laura, who rests
her head on the same pillow as Carmilla.

Yeah, that Laura. She’s a bit of a situation.

The warmth radiating off of her is similar to the way she feels when they hug, and it makes her crave
more contact. Which is still a bit of a new feeling, one the Carmilla isn’t very good at dealing with
yet. Laura taps her hand with a knuckle after a few moments of tense silence. “By the way, about
LaF and Perry—”

Of course.

She rolls her eyes and sits up. “Listen, cupcake. I won’t say a thing, I was serious about that—”

“No, no, I believe you. That’s not what I was saying.” Laura sits up too, but instead of facing her she
scoots next to her. “I just wanted you to know that you weren’t the reason they were acting so weird
around you. They were just worried about you finding out about them.” She rolls her eyes. “Which
was stupid because, it happened, and everything’s fine. They were just being selfish.”

Carmilla nods. “I understand.”

“You do?”

She shrugs. “Self preservation isn’t a tricky concept to understand. Don’t tell them I said this, but... I
don’t blame them.”

“Really?” Laura’s face lights up, her features lifting. Carmilla wonders if her smile looks anything
like Laura’s when she’s this happy. The grin doesn’t last long and Laura deflates a little. “Now I feel
bad.” She looks at her hands. “Me and LaFontaine, we got into a fight, I guess. I mean we talked
about it, but.” She shrugs. “It’s still weird I guess.”

She lays her head back against the pillow and Carmilla shifts to sit next to her. Except Laura is
hogging most of the pillow and laying down without having to roll over her to the other side would
take some effort. She shuffles back a few inches so she can prop herself up on her hand. Not sitting,
but not laying down. Still awkward. Still very, very close.

Laura is looking up at her, a pout on her face. Everything about her screams innocence and purity
and it floors her for at least the hundredth time this week that she’s even given Carmilla a chance in
the first place.

“You should forgive your friends.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”
She’s reminded again that Laura is a hugger when Laura tugs her closer and buries her face in Carmilla’s neck. She feels small arms wrap around her waist. It’s wonderful and it’s terrifying. It isn’t anything like Laura’s usual hugs. It’s soft and warm and something else entirely. She whispers a thanks into Carmilla’s hair before she pulls back. Even when they settle back into the pillows together, the warmth doesn’t leave her.

(Carmilla’s starting to feel like a hugger too.)

“You’re doing that thing again.” Laura says. She taps the tip of Carmilla’s nose with her pinky finger.

“What thing?”

“That thing where it’s obvious you’re a total secret softie.”

Carmilla rolls onto her back. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Laura giggles. “Oh yes you do. Fine, I won’t force you to admit you’re secretly a giant bundle of fluff in black leather, if you’ll shut up and enjoy our fort. Which you have to admit, is pretty awesome.”

Carmilla turns her head and pretends to consider it. “Deal.”

-Kirsch (9:34pm): [2 Attachments]

danny L (9:36pm): The red one.

Kirsch (9:37pm): i knew u’d pick that 1

Kirsch (9:37pm): its the ugly 1

danny L (9:39pm): How is it ugly? It’s just a red tie.

Kirsch (9:39pm): the other 1 is a nicer fabric

danny L (9:40pm): The purple one is too darj.

danny L (9:40pm): dark*

kirsch (9:43pm): but im gunna b wearing black

danny L (9:44pm): Even more reason to wear the red one.

kirsch (9:51pm): its still ugly

danny L (9:51pm): It’s our school colors. Don’t you zetas jack off to school pride or something?

kirsch (9:53pm): haha very funny

-It’s the crashing sound of pots and pans that wakes her up, which shouldn’t even phase her anymore. Her Dad is about the clumsiest man alive, but he tries. It takes about a minute for Laura to get her
bearings, because for the most part she’s just eager to fall back asleep. She’s warm and tired and her eyes are already drooping again and Carmilla-

Laura's entire body is pressed against her. Around her? Her arm is splayed out across Carmilla's stomach and Carmilla is tucked underneath her chin. Around her, definitely around her. From upstairs, she can hear another crash that sounds suspiciously like all the water bottles stacked on top of the refrigerator coming crashing down. Laura sits up, being careful not to wake up a very cute sleeping Carmilla. Her hair is curlier in the morning, before it's been brushed. She looks softer somehow. Smaller. Laura untangles herself from the mess of limbs and blankets they had made and barely makes it out of the fort without bringing it crashing down. And that's an achievement, because they are very tangled and very crowded in there. Also, the majority of her body is still aching, thanks to Marching Band season.

At least she got abs by October last year. She's looking forward to getting those back.

The cold air hits her legs as soon as she's out of the cocoon they had made. Laura's wearing her Adventure Time shorts, which Carmilla had poked fun at last night. Carmilla had worn a respectable pair of plaid bottoms and a hoodie. She had tossed her hair into a messy bun but it must have come out sometime between their impromptu game of twenty questions and falling asleep between the pillows.

Laura checks her phone for the time. The battery symbol blinks up at her for a few moments and then promptly dies out, which is perhaps unsurprising considering they were up until at least 3am watching videos on her phone.

She wanders up the stairs and into the kitchen where she assumes her Dad is cooking his usual slumber party breakfast feast: pancakes and bacon.

He’s not.

He’s standing on a chair?

“Laura. Don’t move.”

“Oh.” She furrows her eyebrows. “Dad?”

“There may or may not be a snake in the house.”

Her muscles tense almost instantly. “What?”

“Snake. In the house.” He’s still wearing his wild wild west pajamas, and like every grown man with an irrational fear of harmless snakes, he has a frying pan in his hands. “I think it got in when we left the door open while we were grilling.”

“Where?”

“I’m not sure. Possibly in the pantry.”

Things start to make more sense once she notices the scattered pile of pots and pans across the kitchen floor. “And do you really think standing on a chair is gonna get rid of it?”

“I don’t want to get rid of it, I want to sell this house right now.”

She laughs and he scowls at her until they hear a sound like a hiss coming from the pantry. He doesn’t react until she jumps up on the counter, which means yeah, she probably imagined it. That
doesn’t mean she plans to ever leave this counter. No, she’s good. She’s doing just fine right here. “Can’t we scare it away?”

“Well if you’ve got any idea what scares a snake, I’m all ears.” He whispers, like the snake could hear them. She highly doubts the snake could care less.

That doesn’t mean she’s willing to test out that theory. “Apparently not kitchen supplies, did you just start throwing pans at the thing when you saw it?”

“I didn’t know what to do!”

A noise comes from somewhere in the kitchen and they both tense before they even bother to locate it. Laura already has a spatula in her hand when she realizes it’s just the basement door creaking open.

A very sleepy Carmilla raises her eyebrows at the scene. Her hair is disheveled and she probably couldn’t even qualify as half-awake if she tried, which she clearly has no plans to do.

"Let me guess. You're reenacting a scene from Tom & Jerry?" She frowns and there’s just about nothing on earth quite as adorable as a confused Carmilla. "Why are you both Tom?"

"There's a snake."

"In the house?"

Laura looks at her Dad. Her Dad looks at her. They both look at Carmilla and nod. "Unfortunately.

"Why are you on the counter?"

"There's a snake."

"In the house," He adds.

"My Dad is terrified of them."

“She is too.”

“Less terrified.” Laura argues, but shrugs. “I just have a healthy fear.”

Carmilla's lips quirks up and she pulls out a stool from the table. "I've gotta say, your plan of attack looks solid."

Her spatula-wielding arm drops back to her side. "How are you not freaking out? Are you some kind of snake whisperer by any chance, 'cause that would be super right about now."

Carmilla folds her hands on the table top and shrugs. "I'm not Harry Potter, if that's what you're asking. But not much scares me."

Laura makes a mental note to address the fact that Carmilla makes Harry Potter references later.

Her Dad, the brave and daring Sheriff, lets out a sigh of relief. "Can you get rid of it?" Laura is almost embarrassed for him, but to be fair, she's also crouching on a counter top, so. She's not exactly in a position to judge. Or do much but beg.

"Please, Carm?"
These are the magic words because Carmilla sighs and with an okay, she picks up a pot and takes Laura's spatula before venturing into the pantry.

Laura hears two things in the following minute. The first: a shuffle as Carmilla moved around the boxes of brownie mix on the ground. The second: Carmilla saying three words she will never live down.

"Hey, little buddy."

Laura hops off the counter. "Is it big?"

"He's cute." Carmilla pulls back from the pantry with what Laura assumes is the tail of a garden snake wrapped around the handle of her spatula. The head and body are hidden inside the pot and thank god for that.

"Please get rid of it." Laura squeaks. Oh God, she keeps her cereal in that pantry.

"Your wish is my command."

Her Dad only steps down from his chair when Carmilla slips through the glass door, snake in hand. He nods at Laura. "Okay. We're keeping her."

(Yeah. Laura likes that idea.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags #hsau updates for chapter updates and #carmilla hsau for general updates on the AU.
“Can we start yet? It’s been five minutes.”

LaFontaine rolls their eyes at the new member, “We don’t start until Perry gets here.”

“Well Perry is almost five minutes late.”

“Well Perry is getting all of us snacks, so the least we can do is wait for her.”

LaFontaine levels her with a look and luckily that shuts her up. They appreciate when someone new enters the group, but there’s always that underlying weariness that comes with the idea of having to expose their secrets to another person.

Perry rushes into the room a moment later with two large bags of chips and a container of trail mix. She drops the trail mix and one of the bags onto the table they’re sitting around, “Sorry I’m late! I got held up in Crim and then had to grab these from my locker.” She slides in next to LaFontaine and plops the extra bag of chips in front of them, “Here you go, sweetie.”

LaFontaine smiles as they rip into the bag. The flavour is sour cream and onion today and that’s one of their favourites. It’s like Perry knew they’ve been having a bad week and could use the pick-me-up.

(Perry knows everything, really. Well, at least until lately. They try not to think about that too much.)

Perry leans forward to give them a kiss but LaFontaine discreetly shifts to the side, eyeing the new guest. They clear their throat loudly, “So, Perry. This is Sandra. She’s new. And she wants to join the GSA.”

Perry turns to her right and nods slowly before glancing back in LaFontaine’s direction. She slips a hand under the table and gives them a light squeeze on their knee, “Welcome, Sandra. Has anyone explained the rules yet?”

Sandra sighs, “No, because we were waiting-”

“-for you to come and bring us all these free snacks that you were generous enough to bring yourself.”
Laura lets out a soft laugh, offering them a smile and they’re quick to give one back. It chips away at the tiny ball of worry that has settled itself in their chest lately, and they feel like they can breathe a little easier.

Perry turns to LaFontaine, giving them another quick squeeze on the knee. She leans close to their ear and whispers, “Honey, please behave. We were all new once.”

LaFontaine sighs and folds their hands on top of the table, “Alright, does someone other than Perry and I want to explain the rules?”

They glance around the room. There’s a few kids from band who never share, so they’re probably out. Danny slouches in her seat and the look of apathy on her face tells LaFontaine that she would rather die than contribute. The rest of the group are either fairly new or someone like Jake who probably doesn’t even remember what the rules are.

That leaves them with Laura, who was really the only clear option since she’s had her hand eagerly raised in the air the second the question left their lips.

They sigh and with a lopsided grin they gesture towards her, “Alright, Laura, take it away.”

Laura smiles and takes in a deep breath before turning towards Sandra, “First off, it’s really great of you to come today. There needs to be more solidarity between LGBT youth and their allies. So, this is like, totally great of you. So thanks.” She looks a bit nervous - this is her first introduction speech of the group - and LaF gives her an encouraging look before she continues, “But, anyway, so I guess the first rule is that what is said in here stays in here. Which is, like, kind of obvious but it still needs to be said? Because it’s not safe for some of us out there if people knew who we were. And, on that note, you don’t have to talk about what you identify as or why you’re here - as long as you respect everyone else’s privacy.”

She glances towards LaFontaine and they give her a nod to continue.

“So, then the other rules are pretty standard. Respect everyone. No laughing at questions - because there are no such things as stupid questions. Contribute as little or as much as you like. And - enjoy the snacks.” She ends it with a little nod to herself and LaFontaine feels a strange pride swell in their chest. Laura is one of the good ones, and they’re suddenly very lucky to have her in their life.

Perry claps her hands together, “That was perfect, Laura. Thank you.” She turns to Sandra, “Do you have any questions?”

Sandra reaches forward and grabs some trail mix, “Um, kind of. So, my best friend is gay. I think.”

Danny laughs and shakes her head. Perry nods, “What makes you think so?”

“Well, she came out to me last night.”

LaFontaine sighs, “There’s not much thinking, then.”

Perry gives them a look and they roll their eyes, “I mean, if she told that to you then you should respect how she identifies.”

“Yeah, but,” Sandra fiddles with a pretzel, “She never seemed gay to me? Like, at all. So, how is she supposed to know?”

LaFontaine feels a tightness in their chest. Sandra’s starting to straddle the line of curiosity and ignorance, and sometimes it’s hard for them to be the bigger person and educate. Perry must sense
this because she reaches over and presses a calming touch to their forearm.

Perry shrugs, “Well, there are lots of ways to know that you’re not straight. And your identity doesn’t always present itself as stereotypes.” Perry looks around and smiles, “This can actually presents a really great topic for today’s meeting: coming out.”

Danny leans forward, “I didn’t really have a choice in my coming out. There was a rumour going around that I was a lesbian - which I’m not - and it was most likely going to reach my parents. I kind of would rather they didn’t hear it from a stranger, so I just decided to tell them I’m bi. I was hoping that maybe hearing it from me would make them a bit more understanding,” she rolls her eyes, “Which was a load of shit because they’re still *assholes* - but, whatever.” She shrugs, “I guess what I mean to say is your friend is lucky that she told you when she felt ready - because I was not - and you should feel honoured and respect that.”

Sandra nods and chews on a few handfuls of trail mix, “I didn’t freak out or anything, if that’s what you’re saying.”

Danny shakes her head and Perry presses, “How did you react, then?”

“Well, I obviously told her I didn’t care. But,” she pauses, “It was kind of weird.”

LaFontaine takes in a deep breath, ignoring the rising anger in their chest. They manage to get out with as minimal snark as possible, “And what was so weird about it?”

Sandra suddenly looks very small before she looks up with a confused expression, “I mean - what happens to us?”

LaFontaine can’t help their scoff, “Just because your friend came out as gay doesn’t automatically mean she wants to sleep with you.”

Perry tsks, “*LaFontaine.*”

“What? It’s true. And it’s a gross stereotype, so I’d rather call her out for it than have her go home and end up being weird around her best friend. That’s terrible.”

Perry stills, “Right.”

LaFontaine immediately backtracks, “I didn’t mean-”

Perry shakes her head and smiles, “I know. Don’t worry, sweetie.”

Sandra interrupts them, “Um, I didn’t really mean to be offensive. It’s just - do things have to change between us now?”

LaFontaine notices a slight change in her tone. It’s gone from curious to confused. They try to be delicate about this, “Do you want there to be a change?”

Sandra opens her mouth but immediately closes it, “I don’t know. I don’t think so? But-” she picks at her nails, “I mean, I’m not gay, but the idea of dating her is not entirely terrible?”

“I can understand that.”

LaFontaine whips their head towards Laura and raises their eyebrows. She frowns, “What? Like, I’m obviously straight but love is love, right?”

(LaFontaine is going to have to email Laura their definition of *obvious* because maybe they’re
“Right.” LaFontaine hopes that their face is not giving away too much. This is Sandra’s journey - and they guess Laura’s, now, too - and things need to be figured out in due time.

Perry saves them by turning back to Sandra, “These kinds of feelings are completely normal. You might just be curious. And sexuality can change over time, so if this is the first time you’re thinking about stuff like that it’s okay. I mean, for me, I didn’t even realize I was asexual until a few years ago - and before that it wasn’t really something I considered. So, time will tell.”

Sandra tilts her head, “Oh. I had always assumed you both were dating.”

LaFontaine gives a hesitant look towards Perry. She offers them a smile and so they turn back towards Sandra, “We are dating.”

“But - she just said she’s asexual.”

They watch out of the corner of their eye as Perry visibly deflates. They sit up straighter and reach over to lace their hand with Perry’s, bringing them up to rest on top of the table, “And? That doesn’t change how in love I am with this girl. She’s the most wonderful girl on this planet and I’m incredibly lucky to have her.”

Perry squeezes their hand and reaches over to give them a kiss on the cheek, “You’re very sweet.”

“I’m just telling the truth.”

“Uh, sorry. I didn’t mean to be rude,” Sandra slumps, “I’m not making a very good impression.”

Laura leans forward in her chair, “It’s okay. This is a learning experience for all of us.”

She flashes a smile in their direction and - yeah, Laura is really kind of wonderful.

The rest of the meeting is fairly uneventful and they wrap it up with a promise to discuss queer movies and tv shows next week.

Laura approaches them after the meeting, “So, I was wondering if I could get a ride home tonight?”

It’s her way of telling LaFontaine that they’re okay now, and they immediately agree, “Yeah, of course.” They think about the topic of today’s meeting and take a deep breath, “Um, listen. Perry and I were kind of thinking about it and I guess in the spirit of coming out we were wondering if we could maybe come out to your dad?”

Laura squeals, “Oh gosh, of course! I promise he’ll be totally cool about it.”

Perry sighs in relief, “Thank God. We’re just - it’s really hard to have to pretend all the time. It would be nice to have another space other than our rooms and GSA to be ourselves.”

Laura nods eagerly, “Of course! Uh, how about tomorrow night? You can come over for dinner.”

LaFontaine feels that cool dread in the pit of their stomach but pushes past it. This is suddenly so real. They nod, “Yeah, that’s cool.”

Laura actually claps at that and is already pulling out her phone, “This is great! I’ll text my dad now. Any preferences for dinner?”

They shake their head and slip their hand into Perry’s, “No, we’re pretty cool with anything.”
Laura just shrugs and sends him a text as they make their way out of the room.

(Yeah, Laura is definitely one of the good ones.)

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After school, Laura has a weird craving for some chocolate chip cookies and decides to nip it in the bud and goes straight to baking. By the time she’s finished, however, the whole process makes her lose her appetite.

(Baking just takes so long. It’s more fun to make stuff, anyway.)

So now Laura finds herself left with an empty house and a full plate of cookies.

She stares at it and thinks of Carmilla – which, she has to admit is becoming quite the habit. Not associating Carmilla with cookies, of course, but more so associating her with *everything*. She thinks about her almost all the time and Laura smiles as she wonders if this is what it really feels like to start to make a best friend.

She’s suddenly hit with a *brilliant* idea and hops to the cupboard to pull out a tupperware. After dumping the entirety of the tray into the container she pulls out her phone.

**Laura (5:35pm):** Hey! What are you up to right now?

**Carm (5:37pm):** just got home from walking Will to a friend’s house.

**Carm (5:38pm):** he’s such a baby.

Laura smiles. She has a nagging suspicion that it wasn’t exactly Will’s idea to get walked to a friend’s place, but she’ll let it slide.

She shoots her dad a quick text before putting on her shoes and heading out the door.

The walk isn’t that long - only about twenty minutes - and Laura checks her phone again for the sixth time to make sure she has the right address. After she confirms - *again* - that it was the right one, she continues to follow the tiny marker on her map app.

She finally gets to the front door and hovers there, smiling to herself. She loves surprises. Sometimes she’s not sure whether she likes to get them or give them, but in this moment she can’t help the giddy feeling rising in her chest at the thought of surprising Carmilla.

(She knows she’s going to be a total *grump* about the entire thing, but that’s what makes it way more fun.)

She rings the doorbell and waits a few moments. Nothing. She tries to ring it a few more times and taps at the container while she waits.

*Still* nothing.

She frowns and glances down at her phone: 6:07pm. She hadn’t texted Carmilla too long ago - could she have gone out already? She sighs and hits call on her contact icon.

“Hello?”

“Hey! You’re a hard woman to get ahold of.”
“I literally picked up after two rings.”

Laura laughs, “No, I mean - come to your front door.”

There’s a pause.

“Carmilla?”

“Are you here? At my house?”

“No, I’m in Florida.” Laura smiles and rolls her eyes, “Of course I’m at your house.”

There’s shuffling in the background, “I’ve told you before that we can go to your place if you want to hang out. Will is going to be weird.”

Laura furrows her brows, “I thought Will was at a friend’s place?”

Another pause. “It’s just - Laura, it’s not a good time right now.”

“Listen, if you don’t want to hang out you can just tell me. I’m a big girl - I can handle it.” She tugs her lip between her teeth, “Do you have another friend over or something?”

“What? Don’t be ridiculous.”

(The admission calms something in her chest.)

“Can you just let me in, then? It’s really hot out and I brought cookies.”

“You brought - fuck.” There’s some more shuffling before the line goes dead on the other end.

“Carm? Carm?”

She’s about to re-dial the number when the door whips open. Carmilla’s hair is thrown up in a messy bun and she’s wearing that oversized Doctor Who t-shirt underneath a zip-up sweater. It’s the one that Laura gave her to borrow after their sleepover.

(It was a dare of hers for Carmilla to wear it under her hoodie. Laura knew Carmilla thought it was soft and so insisted she just take it home with her on the Sunday night to spare her the embarrassment of asking to borrow it herself.)

She almost smiles at how cute Carmilla looks but notices that she has a frantic look in her eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Are those the cookies?”

She looks down, “Um, yeah?”

“Great,” Carmilla reaches forward and grabs them, “I’ll text you later with my review.”

She’s about to slam the door shut when Laura pushes forward and stops it with her hands, “Woah - what is up with you?”

Carmilla grips at the door and darts her eyes behind Laura, “I already told you this wasn’t a good time.”

“Uh, yeah, I can see that.” Laura leans forward, “You’re being really weird. Even for you.”
“Listen, cupcake? We can talk about this tomorrow.”

“Just—” Laura sighs, “Let me just come inside for a second.” Before Carmilla can protest Laura is across the threshold. She gets about five steps inside when she realizes that she doesn’t know where anything is. She looks around for a few moments and breathes out a deep breath. Carmilla’s house is nice. In the entrance there is a long winding staircase that leads to their upstairs. She can already count about four different rooms in sight and above her head is the most intricate chandelier she has ever seen.

(It’s not like Laura has seen a lot of chandeliers in her lifetime, but she can tell extravagant when she sees it.)

“You have a really nice place.”

“I’ll make sure to give you the name of the decorator,” Carmilla rushes forward and roughly grabs Laura by the arm, re-directing her in the way of the front door.

Laura pulls her arm back, “Why are you being so weird?”

Carmilla licks her lips and runs a shaky hand through her hair, scratching at her bun. She ducks around to look out the front door before looking back at Laura. The frantic panic still hasn’t left her eyes.

“I’m fine.”

“You are not fine.” She stares at the underlying tremble buzzing beneath the surface of Carmilla skin, at the bags under her eyes. Laura takes a step forward, “Are you - are you high right now?”

Carmilla barks out a laugh, “God, I fucking wish.”

Laura frowns. She’s seen this enough times to recognize it. “I’m being serious.”

Carmilla shakes her head, “I’m sober. I’m fine. Now, Laura, please. Just - you’ve gotta get out of here.”

Her tone is about an octave higher than usual and a sick feeling is starting to take residence in the bottom of her stomach, “You’re starting to scare me.”

“I’m just - I’m not allowed to have visitors at the house without asking permission first. I really don’t want the first time my mom properly meets you to be in a bad light.”

Laura blows out a breath of relief and smiles, “That’s it? You’re freaking out over something that silly?”

Carmilla’s face goes cold, “It’s not silly.”

Laura rolls her eyes and grins, “It’s kind of silly. Admit it.”

“Okay, get out.”

Ah, yes. Here’s the shapeshifter again. Laura thought she’d seen the last of her weeks ago.

“There’s no need for you to be rude.”

“And there’s no need for you to talk about things you have no fucking clue about.”
“Well maybe I would know if you just talked every once in a while!”

Carmilla lets out a hollow laugh, “Like you could even understand.”

Laura is about to bite back a retort about how it’s hard to understand anything when she’s given no information but there’s a slight shuffle behind them.

“Carmilla.”

Laura is startled and turns around to come face-to-face with Miss Karnstein. Carmilla remains frozen by her side. Laura smiles, “Oh, hello, ma’am. I didn’t hear you come in.”

“Yes, well, I’ve managed to perfect the art of getting into my own home with very little noise.” She directs her attention to Carmilla, “Darling, I didn’t know we were going to have company tonight? I could have brought home extra groceries for dinner if I had some advance notice.”

Laura smiles wider. Carmilla was just overreacting. She’s about to pull out her phone and text her dad to let him know she’ll be staying for dinner when there’s a hard grip around her wrist.

“She was just about to leave.”

Laura turns to Carmilla, “Well, honestly, if you’re having dinner I can stay around to-”

“You really should get going. I have that big project to work on.”

Carmilla roughly pushes her in the direction to leave and stops short of the front door.

(Laura’s convinced if the glass door had been already open that Carmilla would have thrown her right onto the porch.)

“Um,” she looks behind Carmilla and gives a shy wave, “It was very nice to meet you, Miss Karnstein.”

“The same to you, dear. It’s always wonderful to meet friends of my darling Carmilla.”

Carmilla looks like she’s going to throw up. Laura briefly wonders if she’s honestly that embarrassing that Carmilla can’t even stand the thought of dinner with her and her mother. She doesn’t have much time to contemplate it because Carmilla is rushing them both out the door and onto the porch.

She scowls, “I could stay for dinner you know. I don’t have plans tonight.”

“I just told you - I have a big project to work on.”

“You don’t even care about homework.”

“Maybe I’m turning over a new leaf.”

It feels as if the girl standing in front of her isn’t the one that she’s spent almost every day with this past month. She’s not the girl who sends her good morning texts or walks her to class or tutors her in math for nothing in return. And she’s certainly not the girl from a few days ago who looked her in the eye at 2 in the morning and reassured Laura - when she didn’t believe in herself - that she could handle anything she wanted to do in this world because she believed Laura to be brave.

No. The girl standing in front of her right now is far from that person.
(She can hardly recognize this girl.)

“I just want to figure out why you’re acting like this. Maybe if I knew, I could figure out—”

“Stop it with the journalist crap. I’m not some story or piece for you to figure out. You’re just a child and you understand nothing. Not about life, not about this place - and certainly not about what it takes to survive in a world. So you know what? The sooner you stop playing Lois Lane, the better off you’ll be.”

The words slap her across the face and she can’t stop the tears that are pricking the corners of her eyes.

“How are you being so mean?”

“You haven’t seen mean.”

“God, it’s no wonder you have no friends!” The moment the words leave her mouth Laura immediately wants to reach out and shovel them back inside. Something hard flashes across Carmilla’s face and Laura wants to ask about it but the words die on her lips. Laura quickly wipes at her eyes and sniffles, “I - I should go.”

Carmilla locks her jaw and throws her hands into her pockets, “Yeah. Probably.”

Laura waits for her. For an explanation, an excuse, an apology - but nothing comes. It spurs a hiccup of a cry to rise up her throat and her face goes red for it slipping out while she’s still in front of Carmilla.

Carmilla looks like she wants to say something but keeps her resolve and stands in silence. Laura gives her a small nod and turns on her heel, walking away as quickly as she can.

(She sometimes forgets that not all surprises end well.)

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Laura slams the door behind her and kicks off her shoes. She storms to the kitchen and marches to the refrigerator, ripping the door open. She surveys the contents and slams that shut, too. She’s still reeling and the sight of everything makes her feel sick.

“Uh, is everything okay?”

She turns and throws a hand to her chest, “Oh my God, I didn’t even see you there.”

Her dad stares at her above the newspaper he has open in front of him, “Yeah, I kind of figured that when you rushed in here like a hurricane and didn’t greet me with your usual Hi, Dad! Arrest any bad guys at work or did you just drink Pepsi all day?”

She stomps to the table and slumps into a seat. She knows he’s trying to lighten the mood but she can’t bring herself to smile.

He sighs and puts his paper down, “What’s up, kiddo?”

“Nothing. I just kind of got into a fight with someone.”

He straightens up, “Do I need to make any threats? Flash my badge and gun around a few times?”

Laura offers a weak smile and rolls her eyes, “No, just,” she pauses, “just a pretty terrible argument.”
“Well, if I know anything about fights it’s that they’re filled with regret. If you’re this upset, maybe you should give them a call? Try to patch things up.”

She sighs because she knows he’s right. It doesn’t mean she likes it. She blows out a breath while she takes out her phone and dials the familiar number.

She’s not sure if she’s hoping for it to go to voicemail or for her to answer.

(Either way, he heart is beating way too fast for her liking.)

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Carmilla speed walks towards the kitchen when her she can hear her phone ringing. She’s about to reach into her pocket to answer it when she feels a harsh pull on her bun and she takes the familiar journey forward, her forehead connecting roughly with the kitchen counter.

She stumbles backwards and tries to catch her footing. The pain is already blinding and she can hear her mother from behind her, “This isn’t the kind of night I wanted to have with us, but it looks like you’ve given me no choice.”

(The phone stops ringing. In another universe, she would have been able to answer.)

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Laura looks down at her phone and sighs when it goes to voicemail again.

Her dad offers her a smile, “No answer?”

She shakes her head and he stands up to grab a pack of cards from the top shelf.

“Allright, well, you seem pretty bummed so you know what this means: father-daughter Rummy tournament.”

She actually manages to laugh at that and makes sure to tell him she loves him before he starts dealing the cards.

(Shes hit with the fact that no matter how bad things get that she’s incredibly lucky to have such a supportive parent. And that’s something to be happy about.)

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Carmilla manages to make it to the stairs but she hesitates at the bottom, the sight of her mother slowly approaching her from the kitchen making her stop in her tracks.

(Shes seems like she’s in the mood for a chase tonight. That is never a good sign.)

“You know my rule about guests.”

She tenses, her grip on the railing tight enough that her knuckles go white. If she times this right, she can make a break for her room before her mom reaches the bottom step, “I know. She just showed up, I had no idea she was coming or else I would have told her not to.”

This is her chance. She should be running - taking the steps two at a time and not looking back. But she’s rooted to the spot and the words come tumbling out of her mouth, forced habit and conditioning she still can’t quite understand: “I’m sorry.”
Her mother smiles, lips crimson and stretched across ridged skin. She shakes her head, “As you should be.”

Forget fight or flight. Those instincts don’t exist when Carmilla’s mom is staring her down with the eyes of a hawk. The look reaches forward and wraps Carmilla in an invisible rope, coiling in a slow tightness around her body until she feels the familiar strain around her chest. She’s stuck: too paralyzed to move, to speak, to breathe.

Her mother takes a few steps forward and something inside of her feet wake up, her steps clumsy as she tries to bound up the stairs.

(Looks like flight is kicking in after all.)

She learns it’s not fast enough as she feels the recognizable pull at the back of her skull from her mother grabbing her hair and pulling back hard. She stumbles backwards and falls down a few steps, landing face-first on the hardwood floor.

(Think of Laura.)

She tries to get up but her attempts are met with a swift kick to her side. She wheezes, clenching her side as her mother delivers another blow to her ribs.

(Her eyes. God, those eyes. They’re lit up like burning galaxies, a supernova ready to die out and give birth to a billion more stars.)

She rolls onto her back and shakes from the pain.

(Her laughter. She can almost smile just remembering it.)

Her lips twitch in memory. She hears a grunt, alerting her that her mother must have seen. Carmilla braces herself as her mother reaches down and pulls her up by her bun. She whines out in pain, tears prickling the corners of her eyes.

(Laura in Health class. Laura on the bus. Laura with crumbs at the corner of her lips.)

She’s grabbed roughly by the shoulders and pulled to stand up straight. Before she can find her footing her mother strikes her hard across the cheek.

(What it would feel like to taste those lips.)

“Why do you make this so difficult?” Her mother grabs her face with both hands, looking hard into the eyes that are bound to already be bruising. “Why must you make me do this to you?”

(Laura, please.)

She tries to answer but her mom just slaps her again.

(Laura. Laura. Laura.)

“Mom,” she more spits the words out than says them, “Please.”

(She’s burning, shining brighter than a thousand suns. She wishes she could bask in this light forever.)

Her mother shakes her head and throws her against the bottom of the stairs, delivering one last kick to the abdomen before stepping over Carmilla’s limp body, the wolf crawling back into sheep’s skin.
(She is bright - so, so bright.)

She feels a cool line of wetness flow down against her burning cheeks. Her eyes slowly blink closed. Everything goes black.

(It wasn’t bright enough.)

-----

Kirsch pulls up to the house and takes out his phone.

**Kirsch (7:23am): dude im outside. r u ready?**

**Will (7:24am): i’ll be down in a few minutes!!**

It’s the Zeta anniversary today and Kirsch came up with the idea of all the Zeta’s getting rides to school so they could make an entrance together. Since Will is basically still an infant he was one of the few guys that needed a ride. He’s kind of like a little bro to Kirsch, so he was first to volunteer.

**Rude** comes on the radio and he sings along under his breath while he waits.

(Whatever, it’s totally a cool song.)

Before the song is over Will comes bursting into his truck. Kirsch looks him up and down, “Looking sharp, little bro. I’m proud.”

Will smiles wide and glances down at his dress shirt and tie, “Really? Cool. Thanks, man.” He reaches into his bag and pulls out what looks like twenty ties, “Do you think this will be enough for Jake to choose from?”

Kirsch’s raises his eyebrows, “Uh, yeah. I think he’ll be good.” He glances behind Will and towards the entrance of his house, “Is your sister coming?”

“Huh?”

“Dude, your sister. Like, it would be rude of me to come give you a ride and not offer her one, too.”

“Oh,” Will shrugs, “She tripped down the bottom of the stairs last night so she’s probably going to stay home today and rest.”

Kirsch frowns, “Is she okay? Like, does she need anything?”

Will shakes his head, “Naw, it’s okay. I got home last night and luckily it was right after she tripped, so I was able to help her up and get her some ice.” Will laughs, “Honestly, my sister is the clumsiest person you’ll ever meet.”

Kirsch smiles and puts the truck into drive, “Bro, that’s kind of hilarious. She seems all cool and smooth all the time.”

Will turns to him with wide eyes, “Don’t tell anyone that I said she’s clumsy. Or like, uncool in any way. She’ll *kill* me.”

He laughs, “Don’t worry. Secret’s safe with me, bro. Zeta honour.”

Will lets out a sigh of relief, “Thanks.”
He tries to keep his smile at bay at the look of genuine relief on Will’s face.

(He always wanted a little bro. This is kind of cool.)

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Laura (9:09pm): I tried calling you a few times earlier tonight..can you call me back? We should talk.

Laura (9:39pm): You know, that kind of stuff wasn’t cool of you to say.

Laura (9:39pm): It was mean and rude and really hurt my feelings.

Laura (9:40pm): I just thought that we were past that kind of stuff?

Laura (9:41pm): I know I’m pushy sometimes

Laura (9:42pm): A lot of the time I guess

Laura (9:51pm): I’m sorry for what I said. I didn’t mean it

Laura (10:18pm): I’m going to go to bed soon. But if you feel like giving me a call go ahead. I’ll keep my phone on ringer

Laura (10:19pm): So just like call whenever you want

Laura (10:35pm): Goodnight. Sweet dreams

Laura (6:02am): Morning!!

Laura (7:14am): I was thinking maybe we could talk today on the bus

Laura (7:16am): You know if you want to

Laura (7:58am): Where are you? Are you coming to school today?

Laura (7:59am): I just noticed Will isn’t on the bus either so you’re probably getting a ride with him or something

Laura (8:02am): So we could just maybe talk at lunch?

Laura (8:04am): If you want

Carmilla closes her eyes and she lays back against her pillow. The dull ache in her head is nothing compared to the heavy weight that’s pressed against her heart after reading each new text message.

She briefly considers replying but she doesn’t even know what to say.

(‘Sorry my mom is terrible? Sorry I’m such an asshole? Sorry I don’t know how to keep a fucking friend because I’m rotten on the inside?’)

She can feel her heart rate pick up as she stares at the other notification on her phone screen.

[One Voicemail - Mother]
She takes in a deep breath and presses the play button before bringing it up to her ear.

“Good morning, darling. I hope you’re feeling well. I just want you to know that I had already emailed all of your teachers to let them know that you would be absent today. I’m sure this is ultimately for the best, so if you do decide to go to school you can just head back home. Just remember that we can avoid these kinds of things in the future if you just behave. I know you’re a very smart girl and that you understand, but in case you’ve forgotten. I’ve left some aspirin on the counter downstairs and just make sure to rest up today. I love you, Carmilla.”

The line goes dead and Carmilla doesn’t realize she’s crying until she starts to gasp for breath and can feel the wetness soaking the collar of her shirt. She presses the top of her phone hard into her forehead, squeezing her eyes shut and smacking it against her skin a few times. She turns onto her side and sucks in a deep breath at the throbbing pain wrapped around her ribs. She grabs an extra pillow and curls herself around it, hugging it as tight as she can. She pushes past the pain as a sob wracks through her body; the comfort of holding onto something is more important than being careful around her bruises.

When her vision isn’t completely blurred by tears anymore she brings her phone up to her face, scrolling through her messages again.

‘You know, that kind of stuff wasn’t cool of you to say’

‘It was mean and rude and really hurt my feelings.’

Her body shakes as a fresh wave of tears hit her all at once. She shakes her head and tries to take in deep breaths without choking on the build-up of fluid running from her nose.

Laura deserves so much better. Deserves someone who isn’t inherently bad. Who isn’t terrible. Who isn’t going to grow up and become just like her.

( Maybe the Breakfast Club did get something right. Maybe she’s going to grow up and her heart is going to die and she is going to become exactly like the person she hates most in the world. Well, the person she hates the most besides herself.)

Carmilla waits until the crying subsides before she pulls her blanket up and completely covers herself with it. She hugs the pillow tighter and wonders what it would feel like if it was a warm body with a living, breathing pulse instead. If she could pour her worries into the skin of someone soft and comforting instead of cool fabric.

( She doesn’t know why she even dreams anymore. She’s not built for that kind of life.)

She should really take another few aspirin and add a new icy hot patch to her ribs but she thinks that she could just sleep off the pain instead.

( At this point, she deserves to feel it.)

-----

Danny rushes to dump her garbage off of the lunch tray and make her way back towards the school. Her Pre-Calculus teacher is a total stickler for being on time and she doesn’t feel like being lectured again on the wonders of punctuality. Especially considering she’s nervous for her track meet after school. She doesn’t need more reason to stress.

She smiles to herself as she notices a really attractive guy across the quad. God bless boys that actually take the time to dress up. It’s just-
It can’t be.

She feels her face morph into something resembling mortification when she realizes that it’s Kirsch. Kirsch. The one person on this planet that will probably always annoy her, idiot leader of the Zetas Brody Kirsch. She glances in the direction of her class but can’t resist her curiosity.

(Shes just thought that Kirsch was - she can hardly think it - hot. This deserves some investigation.)

She walks towards him and he smiles, “What’s up, hottie?”

She looks him up and down, “I see you decided to go with the red one.”

He looks down at his tie and shrugs, “Whatever. You may have been right about it.”

“I’m right about everything.”

He rolls his eyes and she can’t stop herself for asking, “So what’s the deal with playing dress up today?”

“It’s the Zeta’s anniversary. We gotta look our best.”

“And this is your best?” She tilts her head and makes a face, “That’s kind of sad.”

Kirsch scoffs and steps forward, “I look hot and you know it.”

Danny tenses her jaw and tries to look apathetic, “Whatever helps you sleep at night, buddy.”

Kirsch smirks at her in a way that makes her worry that he doesn’t believe that at all, “I’ll sleep just fine. Lulling myself to sleep with the knowledge that you think I’m hot.”

She can feel heat on the back of her neck and she scoffs, “You’re delusional.” She glances towards the school, “Anyway, I’ve gotta go to class. I’m going to be late.”

He nods and starts walking backwards, “Sure. Don’t daydream about me too much, Lawrence.”

She flips him off and ignores how the heat has crept onto her cheeks.

(Shes a teenage girl. She’s sure some sort of mix of hormones is to blame for this brief lapse in sanity.)

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Laura (11:41am): Hey i just got out of class. Wanna meet by our tree?

Laura (11:50am): I just ran into Danny and she told me that you weren’t in AP Lit. Are you sick today?

[Missed call - Laura (11:51am)]

[Missed call - Laura (11:52am)]

[Missed call - Laura (11:52am)]

[Missed call - Laura (11:55am)]

Laura (11:56am): Can you maybe give me a call back when you get this? I’m kind of worried
Laura (12:04pm): My dad knows this really good place that makes the best soup. He brings it for me all the time when I’m sick.

Laura (12:05pm): I can bring some by after school if you want?

Laura (12:07pm): Oh god..that was a stupid suggestion..sorry.

Laura (12:18pm): Just feel better xo

Carmilla sighs, reading the messages for the fourth time in the past hour. She still refuses to answer her back.

(Laura deserves more than she can give. It’s better this way.)

She winces as a deep sigh causes a flash of pain to spread through her ribs. She closes her eyes and tries to will away the pain. The afternoon has passed by and she’s still not at the state that she feels she deserves any kind of pain medication.

She glances at her nightstand and tries to convince herself that she doesn’t need it. That she can get through the pain without it. That she can get through the day and just focus on getting better.

But then the other thoughts start to persist. She needs a distraction. She needs a salvation. She needs something.

On a whim she rolls over and quickly rummages through her drawer. It doesn’t take her long to find it.

(It’s not like she makes much of an effort to hide it.)

The way she feels an immediate sense of relief upon finding what she was looking for makes her briefly concerned. That doesn’t last for long, though; she has enough self-hatred and pity to distract from that.

(At this point she’s almost stopped worrying about herself altogether. No one else does, anyway.)

Danny takes in a deep breath as she stands at the starting line of the track. It’s her first semi-serious track meet of the season and she would be lying if she didn’t admit that she’s a bit nervous. Once she’s on the track, with the wind in her hair and her feet pounding the pavement, she’s completely confident. But it’s these moments before that really get to her.

She feels a bit of relief knowing that some of her Summer Society girls are in the crowds to cheer her on. She even convinced Laura to come along with LaFontaine and Perry. It’s always helpful to have some support in the stands. She glances to her right to see if she can spot any of them when she sees him.

Surrounded by a group of Zetas is Kirsch. Kirsch in his dress pants and black dress shirt and stupid red tie. Kirsch looking painfully good-looking at the moment.

She glances up to the sky and briefly wonders why God hates her so much.

(This is not the kind of thing she needs before a meet.)
There’s no time to address this life crisis because the teacher is signaling for them to get into ready positions. She sets her mark and the moment the whistle blows she’s off in a flash.

She tries to focus on the path ahead but all she can see when she blinks is Kirsch leaning against the fence in that ridiculously attractive outfit. The more she tries to not think of him the more he just appears.

She tries to look at the other runners around her. She’s not the kind of person to objectify women - but this is only in her mind, so she’s allowed a few liberties. The brunette from their rival school has been ahead of her for most of the race and this is the only time she’s ever been grateful for not having a lead. Because that view? It’s pretty wonderful right now.

The whole race tends to go fairly well now that she’s found a distraction from her extremely gross lapse in judgement. It’s only on the last lap that she makes the mistake of glancing at the crowd and - yes, Kirsch has apparently taken to rolling up his sleeves.

She doesn’t know why it makes him more attractive but it just does.

(Excessive running theory that God hates her.)

Unsurprisingly, she’s the first one to cross the finish line - distractions were all fine and well but she wasn’t going to cost a race just because she’s young and hormonal. She bends over and braces herself on her knees, breathing in short bursts. She can hear the crowd cheering and she doesn’t understand why her first thought is to glance in the direction of the section the Zetas were sitting in.

They’re still there, unfortunately, and Kirsch is cheering the loudest of the whole school.

(It puts a smile on her lips and tugs something in her chest.)

She shakes it off and embraces some of her teammates as they go to congratulate her on the win.

When she looks back at the crowd the Zetas are already filing out to leave the field. She pushes away the small part of her that’s disappointed.

She obviously just wanted some eye candy to look at; everyone can have their moments of weakness. It’s not like he’s going to dress like that everyday, anyway.

(By tomorrow she’ll forget all about it. She’s sure of it.)

-----

Perry fidgets with the fork in her hand, stuffing her face with a huge forkful of carrots. Which is for the best because every time she opens her mouth she’s scared the words I’m not straight are going to fall out of her mouth.

“And then after I book him, he tells me that he wants his only phone call to be his psychic! He wanted to know if there were any signs of prison in his future. Can you believe it?”

Silence falls on the table. LaFontaine looks like they’ve been sentenced to death row and Laura keeps nervously laughing at her dad’s story while throwing worried glances towards them. Perry continues to stuff her face as a means of self-preservation.

“Alright, is anyone going to tell me what’s going on?”

Perry freezes. She glances over at LaFontaine and they look like they’re about to pass out. Laura lets
out a nervous laugh, “Um, nothing? We’re just really into this story, dad. Please continue.”

Perry smiles in her direction and appreciates Laura’s ability to wait until they’re both ready to start talking - no matter how painful this dinner has been.

LaFontaine suddenly drops their fork, “We - um, actually - we kind of wanted to talk to you about something, Mark.”

He looks to Laura briefly before looking back at them and nodding, putting his fork and knife down, “Alright, I’m all ears.”

LaFontaine laughs nervously and turns to Perry with a wild look in their eyes. The kind of look that tells her that they didn’t exactly plan what to say next.

Perry takes a deep breath, “Okay, so, it’s actually quite simple, really. So-”

“We’re in love.”

Perry and Laura both turn to LaFontaine with wide eyes. Mark scratches at the back of his head, “All of you?” He glances at Laura, “You never told me you were dating someone.”

Laura makes a face, “Uh, no. That’s not exactly what LaFontaine means.”

Perry finds some of her bravery, “We’re in love. As in, LaFontaine and I.” She takes in a large breath, “Um, with each other?”

His face softens, “You sure about that, honey? You don’t sound confident.” He’s smiling really wide and it’s a comfort because Perry is fairly certain he’s joking.

(At least she hopes.)

She reaches across the table and laces her fingers with LaFontaine’s. They offer her a small smile before she turns back to him, “Yes, I’m sure. I’m - I love LaFontaine. Very much so.”

“Ditto for me, sir.”

Perry rolls her eyes at them but it doesn’t stop the swooping feeling in her chest.

He nods, “Alright, well, thanks for tell me that. It was very brave of you. And you’ll always be accepted under this roof.”

LaFontaine is shaking their leg under the table and Perry knows that they’re aching to reveal that part of themselves, too. She offers them a squeeze of the hand, hopefully conveying the support that they need.

“Thanks.” LaFontaine takes an extra breath, “Uh, there’s more, though.”

“Please don’t tell me one of you are pregnant. I’m fairly certain that it’s not possible for you in your situation, but a father can’t shake these kinds of fears.”

The three of them laugh while he continues to grin at them. Perry feels a small weight off of her shoulders lift.

LaFontaine continues, “No, no. It’s about me. I, um,” they give Perry’s hand a hard squeeze, “I’m genderqueer.”
He makes a face and leans back, “I’m sorry for sounding extremely uncool, but I have to admit that I’m not up to date with your lingo these days and have no idea what that means.”

LaFontaine pauses and Perry reaches across to lay her other hand across their joined hands. LaFontaine smiles, “Um, to put it simply I basically don’t identify with any gender. So, like I don’t really feel like I’m a girl but don’t really feel like a boy, either. And there are some other gender identities out there, but I just feel most comfortable with this. So, uh, basically that’s it. And I would appreciate if you would use they and them when referring to me.”

“Wow,” Mark leans forward and puts his head in his hands, “I feel like I’m living on an entirely different planet.”

Laura’s eyes widen, “Dad!”

He frowns, “I’m - sorry, was that offensive? I just mean you’re opening my eyes to a whole new world here. I think it’s great that you found something to make you feel more comfortable. So, good job.”

He throws up two dorky thumbs up and Perry can’t help but laugh. She can feel LaFontaine relax a bit in their grip on her hand.

She leans forward, “We appreciate you being so nice to us. We’ve been a bit stressed out lately because we’ve been in the closet for the past two years - our parents aren’t supportive in any capacity - so it’s kind of relieving to have an adult that we can be ourselves around.”

He looks between the two of them and nods, crossing his arms, “Listen, I’m happy to offer my home as refuge for you two. But I also need to maintain some sort of reputation as a responsible adult. So, same rules for you two that I give to Laura: open door policy, I’m not running a brothel here.”

Perry doesn’t know if she’s ever felt the blood rush to her face as quick as it does in that moment. She turns to LaFontaine and they’re just as red as she is. They look back at him, “Um, that’s not - we don’t really do that together.”

Perry fiddles with her fingers, “Yeah, it’s, um - I’m asexual. So, I’m not that interested in sex.”

There’s a fast-growing lump at the back of her throat as she waits for his reaction. She doesn’t even know why she said it but it’s not like she can take it back now.

“Oh,” he turns to Laura, “Have you ever considered this method? It sounds like a wonderful way to live.”

It seems like the pattern of the night is who is going to be reddest in the face because suddenly Laura has the same skin pigment as a tomato. She furrows her brow and sputters out, “Dad, that’s not - that’s not really how it works. It’s her sexuality, not a choice -”

Laura’s dad lets out a loud laugh, “I’m just kidding!” He frowns and turns towards Perry, “Was that okay? I like to use jokes a lot to break tense situations and I can tell you kids are really tense, so I just thought why not.”

Perry blows out a breath and a laugh. She’s never really had someone feel as if she was normal enough to joke about things like this, and it feels kind of nice. She smiles and LaFontaine rubs their thumb across the top of her hand, “No, that was - really kind of you, actually.”

He makes a dramatic motion of pretending to wipe sweat off his his brow, “Phew - that was a close one.” He stands up from the table and stretches, “So, do you kids want to watch a movie? Or am I
only cool enough to confess your deep secrets to but not cool enough to hang out with?”

Laura stands up with a laugh and swats at his arm before going on her tip toes to give him a kiss on the cheek, “You’re welcome to watch a movie with us. But no Westerns this time, dad. Seriously, no one likes them.”

LaF stands up and shrugs, “Well, they’re not completely terrible. _The Good the Bad and the Ugly_ is a classic.”

Mark’s face lights up and he steps forward to wrap an arm around LaFontaine’s shoulders, “See! I love this kid,” he looks down at them, “You are becoming my new favourite child.”

LaFontaine laughs as he ushers them towards the living room, more laughter erupting from LaFontaine and Mark at Laura’s grumbling about choosing her friends over her.

Perry stands alone in the kitchen for a moment, breathing out a sigh and feeling a smile grow on her lips.

(She hasn’t felt this light in years. Things are starting to look up for her.)

-----

Laura is walking towards their typical area for lunch when she sees her. Her breath catches in her throat at the sight and she doesn’t hesitate in her decision to drag her feet in that direction.

Carmilla is slumped against the root of a tree trunk - hidden from the side of the field that Laura usually sits at - and she has a book in her lap.

Laura hesitates a few feet away. Carmilla has avoided her texts and calls all week. Is she mad at her? She’s pretty sure the answer to that is yes. But she doesn’t know for sure. Maybe she should take this opportunity to find out.

(And maybe when they’re on better terms she can yell a little bit about the proper etiquette in regards to returning someone’s phone calls.)

“Hey.”

She fiddles with the strap of her backpack as she waits for Carmilla to answer.

All she receives in response is a turned page of her book. Laura sighs.

“So, you’re at school today.”

“Brilliant deduction, Sherlock.”

She frowns and furrows her brow, “Are you mad at me?”

Carmilla turns another page, sighs, “I’m not mad at you.”

“Then why didn’t you return any of my calls? Answer any of my texts?” She takes a tiny step forward, “I was worried about you.”

“There’s no need to worry about me.”

“Well I would have known that if you would have answered my calls.”
“I didn’t feel like talking. Don’t take everything so personally.”

Laura feels a chill inside her chest because how else was she supposed to take this? Carmilla answers every single one of her texts or calls and the first time they get into an argument since they’ve started becoming friends, Carmilla ices her out. She doesn’t like it. It makes her feel sick to her stomach.

“Can I sit?”

Carmilla turns another page, “When has what I’ve said ever made any difference in the past?”

Laura chews at her lip and takes a hesitant seat beside her, keeping a respectable distance between them.

(What is the correct amount of space for ‘I think we’re still friends but you seem mad and I’m also kind of upset because you were really mean but I don’t want us to fight anymore?’

There’s no guidebook on this so Laura will just have to wing it.)

She pulls out her lunch bag and pulls out the half a sandwich and small piece of pie she packed earlier this morning. She grabs the plastic fork from the bottom of the bag and plays with it for a second before turning towards Carmilla, “So. I’d like to talk about what happened on Monday night. If that’s okay with you.”

“I get a choice now. How generous of you.”

Laura winces, “Well, the last time I didn’t listen to what you had to say I got kicked out of your house.”

Carmilla’s hand stills on the page. She blows out a sigh and closes the book, tucking it into her bag. She sits up fully and leans against the tree. Laura wishes she wasn’t wearing those sunglasses so she could try to get a read on her face.

“I’m sorry about the other night. The things I said-” she bumps her head back against the tree trunk, “I was out of line.”

Laura scoots closer - hopefully still at a respectable distance - and shakes her head, “No, I shouldn’t have come over. You’ve made that very clear in the past and I didn’t respect that. I just thought it was a nice surprise, but I should have listened. So I’m sorry. Especially for the mean things I said, as well.” She tucks some hair behind her ear, “But thank you for your apology. I appreciate that.”

Carmilla gives her a small smile, “You make things so simple and complicated all at once. It makes me feel dizzy.”

Laura tilts her head, “What do you mean?”

Carmilla shakes her head and sighs, “It’s nothing.”

Laura wants to press for more information but her apology will mean nothing if she already starts to cross boundaries not a second later.

“So, did I get you in a lot of trouble with your mom for coming over?”

Carmilla turns and faces the other side of the field before looking down and picking at a few blades of grass. Her voice is uncharacteristically small, “Just the usual. It’s not a big deal.”

“I’m sorry again for not listening to you about your mom. I guess it’s hard for me to remember that
not all parents are dorky and an open book like my dad.”

“Yeah.”

The air around them feels heavier than usual and Laura can’t stop thinking about something that has been nagging her for days, “Can I ask you something?”

“Yes, we’re still friends, sweetheart.”

She lets out a nervous laugh, “Um, that wasn’t what I was going to ask - but, okay, good to know.”

Carmilla smiles softly as she waits for Laura to continue, “So, I was just wondering: why did you ignore me all week? Like, you could have texted me to say that you weren’t mad or whatever but you didn’t.”

She picks at the crusts of her sandwich, her stomach churning as she waits for Carmilla to answer. She can already feel those persistent thoughts lurking at the back of her mind, ready to taunt her. She focuses on the pattern of her breathing and tries to shut them out as long as possible.

“I, uh, it’s kind of stupid.”

Laura tries to give her a reassuring smile, “I’m sure it’s not. No judgement from me.”

Carmilla picks a few more blades of grass, “Well, for starters, I felt stupid that I have such a dumb rule in my house. I felt like such a child.”

Laura nods, “I can get that. I feel that way a lot of the time.”

Carmilla smiles - not one of her genuine ones - and picks at her jeans, “Yeah.”

“And, um,” Laura licks her lips and takes a deep breath, “You being away from school? That wasn’t ‘cause you didn’t want to see me, right?”

Her heart rate picks up a few beats. She could have made that come out sounding a little less pathetic, but what’s done is done.

“No, that’s - it’s another stupid thing.” Carmilla takes a deep breath, “I, um - I may have tripped down the bottom of my stairs and hurt myself. I was staying home to rest for a few days.”

Laura feels a sinking feeling weigh her down. Something doesn’t feel right about the explanation and those nagging thoughts come right to the front of her mind. She feels very ridiculous for being worried about Carmilla for the past few days when it’s obvious that she’s making up some sort of excuse and doesn’t trust Laura enough to tell her the truth. And the worst part is that it means Laura is being clingy again and Carmilla clearly just wanted space.

She pokes at her sandwich a few more times as her stomach continues to churn.

She needs to do something to make up for being so annoying, so she pushes her piece of pie forward. She probably wasn’t going to eat it anymore at this point, anyway.

(Shesuddenly lost her appetite.)

Carmilla looks to her, “What are you doing?”

Laura shrugs and tries to smile, “Peace offering?”
Carmilla tugs her lip between her teeth and shakes her head, “You’re too much for me sometimes, cutie.”

She grabs Laura’s offered fork and pulls the piece towards her as she pushes her sunglasses to the top of her head.

“Um, woah. What the hell.”

Carmilla looks up at her, “What?”

“Carm, your-” she frowns and brings her hand up tentatively before deciding to pull it back, “Your eye is bruised.”

Carmilla raises an eyebrow, “Yeah. Fell down the bottom of my stairs, remember?”

“Yeah, but I just thought-” Laura shakes her head. Okay, maybe she was telling the truth. She feels a small bit of relief. “Are you okay?”

Carmilla shrugs as she puts a big piece of pie into her mouth, talking around chews, “I’ll survive.”

She says it so nonchalant, as if falling down the stairs is just a walk in the park. Maybe Laura was right to have been worried.

Laura sits up fully, “Alright, that’s it. C’mere.”

Carmilla gives her a lopsided grin, “It’s very hard to enjoy this pie if you’re so set on interrupting me.”

Laura rolls her eyes and smiles before she grabs the pie and moves it to the other side of her.

Carmilla frowns but she ignores her, instead stretching out her legs and patting her thighs, “Lie down.”

Carmilla’s eyes go wide, “Where? On you?”

If Laura squints enough she could swear Carmilla is blushing. It almost sends heat to her own cheeks. She sits up straighter and tries to appear aloof, “Yes. Put your head in my lap.”

“This sounds like the beginning of a porno that I caught Will watching a few weeks ago.”

Laura laughs and swats at her, completely unable to control the heat on her cheeks now.

“Will you just listen, please? I promise this has a purpose.”

Carmilla sighs but still has a smile plastered on her face. She removes the sunglasses from the top of her head and throws them on her bag before she shifts over and gently lays her head onto Laura’s lap. Upon contact she immediately closes her eyes.

Laura takes a deep breath before reaching down and tenderly running a finger along Carmilla’s temple.

It’s one of the fairly hotter days this week but she can still see Carmilla omit a slight shiver.

Laura watches her throat rise and fall as she takes in a gulp, “What are you doing?”

She continues to softly trace patterns around Carmilla’s forehead, dancing along from temple to temple. She traces a line down the bridge of Carmilla’s nose, “This is something my mom used to
Laura nods but remembers that Carmilla can’t see her. “Yeah, whenever I had a boo boo-”

“Boo boo?” Carmilla smiles wide.

Laura grins and uses her other hand to swat at Carmilla’s arm, “I was 8, okay? Leave me alone.”

Carmilla laughs. It sounds like the song of angels.

“Yes, yes - I’m sorry. Please continue your story. I think you were at boo boo’s?”

Laura rolls her eyes, “Anyway, when I was sick or hurt or upset, my mom used to trace these patterns for me. It always used to calm me down.”

She shrugs. This all of a sudden feels like the worst idea in the world. How she thought she would appear less childish and immature by doing something that used to calm her down when she was 8 is beyond her.

“I know it’s kind of silly-”

“It’s not. It feels really nice.”

Laura continues her patterns, releasing the anxious breath at the back of her throat, “Okay, good. Awesome. Are you feeling a bit more calm?”

“Yes,” Carmilla darts her tongue out to wet her lips, “You tend to have that effect on me.”

Laura holds her breath. It’s the closest thing to opening up that Carmilla has shown so far and she fears that anything she says will ruin the moment.

She doesn’t have to worry that much about ruining anything because before she can say anything Carmilla blindly reaches up - her eyes are still held shut - and grabs at her other hand. She laces their fingers and gives them a tight squeeze, “I really am sorry for ignoring you. If it’s any consolation, you were the only person in this world that I wanted to speak to all week.”

Laura feels a warmth encompassing her entire body, “It’s okay. I really wanted to speak to you, too. Which I think may have been clear by the 40-something texts I sent you.”

Carmilla smiles, slightly leaning into Laura’s touch along her cheek, “I don’t know. I think you would have hit 50 for me to really get the message.”

She knows that she’s making a joke, but it still helps to ease some of her insecurities. She continues to dance a pattern along Carmilla’s jaw while fiddling with the fingers in her other hand.

“You know, first there’s the banjo and then the trampoline and now the stairs. At this rate I’m going to have to get you insurance. And buy you a helmet. Maybe even throw in some elbow- and kneepads.”

Carmilla smiles, almost sadly, “With what money? I’m the one in this-” she pauses, “I’m the one with a job.”

Laura tugs lightly on a strand of hair, “Quiet, you, or I’ll make sure they’re all hot pink.”
“Ah, my favourite colour. How did you know?”

She keeps her hand in her hair and starts to play with her bangs, “I’m actually a psychic. The gig is up.”

“Oh. I’m friends with a psychic. I don’t know how to process all of this amazing new information.”

Laura laughs - free and genuine and light - and it propels her forward slightly. The movement jolts Carmilla - she is in her lap - and it forces her eyes open. She glances down and can’t tear her gaze away from Carmilla’s piercing stare. The air seems to still and she leans further, using her hand to brush Carmilla’s bangs out of her eyes and tuck some more behind her ears.

Carmilla is as still as stone, looking like she’s barely breathing. Laura breaths out in barely a whisper, “Even bruised you’re so beautiful.” She delicately brushes the pad of her thumb across her brow bone, as if she could wipe the markings away, “How do you do it?”

Carmilla searches her face for something. Laura wishes she knew what she was looking for.

Carmilla gulps, “I don’t know. Good skin care regimen I guess.”

“Oh,” Laura can’t stop looking into her eyes, “You’ll have to write it down for me sometime.”

“Yeah, it’s very complicated.”

Laura leans down, “I can only imagine.”

“I can shoot you it in an email.”

“I would appreciate that.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

She’s suddenly way closer to Carmilla’s face than she ever planned to be. She can feel a weird pull in the bottom of her stomach and can hear the blood rushing to her ears.

She must just be really hungry still.

She sits up quickly, nervously fiddling with Carmilla’s fingers.

“I’m really glad you’re okay.”

Carmilla sighs and closes her eyes again, “Thanks, cupcake.”

“And - I’m just really glad we’re still friends,” Carmilla goes to open her mouth but Laura continues on, “I know, I know - but I’m just saying. I am. It, uh, it would have made the next few weeks a bit awkward.”

Carmilla makes a face, “Why? What’s in the next few weeks.”

Wow. Way to be subtle, Hollis.

“My birthday.”
Carmilla’s eyes open, “Your birthday is coming up?” She frowns, “Why didn’t you say anything?”

(Because she wasn’t sure if she’d come? Because she didn’t know if it was too early in their friendship? Because she wants to invite her to her birthday but what if it’s too lame?)

Laura chooses to shrug instead, “I don’t know. I guess it never came up.”

Carmilla levels her with a look, “You don’t strike me as the kind of person who avoids talking about something because it doesn’t come up.”

She blushes. She’s caught. “Well, whatever. I’m bringing it up now.”

Carmilla brings her other hand across her waist and starts playing with their intertwined fingers, “So, what are we doing?”

Laura stills, “What do you mean?”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows, “For your birthday? Is that not what we’re talking about?”

Laura leans back against the tree trunk and shakes her head, letting out a breath, “Yeah, yeah. Sorry. I’m spacing out a lot today.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have been such a saint and kept the pie for yourself.”

Laura flicks her hair, “Shut up or else next time I won’t offer you anything.”

Carmilla brings the hand that’s not joined with Laura’s up to her mouth and mimes closing a lock to her lips and throwing away the key.

Laura rolls her eyes but can’t stop grinning, “I’m going to have a party at my place. It’ll be on the 11th. My birthday is actually on the 12th but it’s more fun to have a party on a Saturday.”

Carmilla nods and leans her head back to settle further into Laura’s lap, closing her eyes again.

“Sounds like a blast. Let me guess: you have pin the tail on the donkey planned?”

Well, she doesn’t anymore. “No. There will be...other fun activities.”

Carmilla laughs, “Whatever you say, cupcake.”

Laura has no answer for that so she decides to pick her battles and settles for continuing to draw patterns on Carmilla’s temples.

She’s sure she has plenty of little bickering matches to win in the future.

(As far as making up from their first fight, she thinks they’re on the right track.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
It takes Carmilla a few seconds to get her bearings when she wakes up.

Morning. Very bright. By some miracle, her side hurts a lot less today. Friday. School day.

She'll see Laura today.

God, she shouldn't be thinking about her this early. With a groan, her eyes close again. She pulls the blanket back over her head and all she sees is Laura. She might as well commit to this stupid crush if it's going to take over her mornings.

(And nights.)

Her mind wanders to all the usual places. The freckles on Laura's cheek. Her crooked smile. The way her hair looks when she pushes it all to one side and tugs at it — she does that when she's anxious. The way her entire body sort of shakes when she’s angry, either from the wild gestures her hands make or the fury of an entire nation packed into five feet and two inches of teenage girl. Laura’s voice. Laura’s laugh. Laura’s eyes, which is stupid. They’re just brown, and Carmilla has never really cared for eyes. Blue eyes are blue eyes, green eyes are green eyes, brown eyes are no different until they’re looking at her and seeing something she’s not ready to believe is even there.

Yeah, she’s more than aware of the fact that this has gone too far. She’s falling for her only real friend and it’s not even a crush anymore. It’s the sad, pathetic, longing kind of falling. It aches and it’s relentless. Carmilla allows herself a few minutes to brood over herself before she palms the sheets around her, feeling for her cell phone. It's the lump underneath her shoulder blade and she rolls over, checking the lock screen for notifications. Three texts from Laura. Carmilla procrastinates reading them in favor of getting dressed without a fuckwit smile plastered across her face. Laura Hollis can do a lot to her but she's not about to turn her into a morning person, of all things.

She slips out from underneath her covers and tries to run a hand through her hair. She almost does it, but it's too tangled. There's a hoodie in the middle of the floor, one of Will's. She doesn't think about it too much, just kicks it across the room and decides to teach him about boundaries some other time. Just because he decides her bedroom floor is a dumping ground for clothes doesn't mean she's about to start doing his laundry again.
With a glance in the mirror, she rolls her eyes at herself and pulls a brush through her hair. Because some ridiculously childish part of her needs to look *pretty*, which is pointless, but not as pointless as spending the day wishing she had brushed her hair more.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid." Carmilla mutters under her breath when she drops her brush on a pile of clothes and books.

She makes quick work of her morning routine, waiting until she's dressed and at least half-awake to check Laura's texts in the bathroom.

**Laura (6:05am):** *i had the WEIRDEST dream last night*

**Laura (6:05am):** *you're probably still sleeping tho*

**Laura (6:06am):** *ill tell you about it on the bus!*

She feels that familiar smile stretch across her face.

**Carm (7:42am):** *in excruciating detail, i'm sure.*

She locks her phone and slips it into her back pocket before taking a quick glance in the mirror. The bruise across her jawline is fading, but not fast enough. She picks up her make-up bag and it's less than sixty seconds later that all traces of a bruise are gone. She’s good at this.

(Six years of muscle memory.)

She could be out the door in less than a minute if she skips breakfast again. That would give her at least twenty minutes at the bus stop to read. But her stomach growls and she gives in, stopping in the kitchen for an apple.

Carmilla skids to a halt, her hand already in the fruit bowl on the kitchen counter. Her mother sits at the counter, which isn't unusual to her morning routine. But her laptop is missing, as is her cup of coffee, and she isn't typing out an e-mail or checking her phone. She's staring at Carmilla.

"You look lovely this morning, Carmilla." She smiles.

Nobody does routine like her mother does. "Mother—"

"I was hoping that we could have a little chat before you go to school this morning." Her hands fold together in front of her. "Sit."

She does, letting the apple in her hand roll back into the fruit bowl. She drops into one of her mother’s expensive bar stools at the island counter. Her laptop is missing, as is her cup of coffee, and she isn't typing out an e-mail or checking her phone. She's staring at Carmilla.

"Tell me about your friend."

"She’s not my friend."

Her mother’s lips quirk into a temporary smile and she shakes her head. “She seemed to be very invested in you.”

*Invested.*
Attachments, connections, investments, it’s like these are the only words in her vocabulary, this is the level at which her mother’s mind works. Everybody always a pawn in her game.

“Yeah, well. I’m not.” Carmilla picks at her fingernails beneath the table. “She’s just some girl in my class. She’s... clingy.”

(And smart and charming and beautiful and ten times the person she could ever be.)

“You have no interest in her.” It’s not a question.

Something catches in her throat and the word comes out strangled. “No.”

“It would be beneficial for you if that were to be the truth.”

She feels her phone vibrate in her back pocket. Carmilla clenches her teeth. “It’s the truth.”

—


Danny looks up from her textbook, where she’s been reading the same paragraph about President Wilson for the last fifteen minutes. Mr. Miles still hasn’t started class and she feels a tap against the front of her desk. With the groan of metal against tiled flooring, Kirsch turns his desk completely towards hers, the back of his chair facing the chalkboard.

She looks up and he looks hyper —and God, it’s way too early to deal with Kirsch. “What do you want?”

“Just wanted to make sure everything’s set up for the car wash tomorrow.” He gives her a thumbs up and nods. “Eleven, right?”

He’s wearing that stupid popped collar shirt he usually does and Danny is still irrationally angry about the fact that she actually found him attractive in his dress clothes. And it’s not her fault that she thinks he’s good looking now, she can’t really shake that sort of thing once she finds somebody attractive in the first place. She still has a lingering crush on the assistant swim coach who switched schools halfway through Danny’s sophomore year. It’s unavoidable, it happens, that doesn’t mean she’s ever going to forgive herself for thinking Kirsch is cute.

Not cute, hot. There’s a difference. He’s not cute.

“Yeah, eleven. And you know what, you better show up because I’m not about to lose the funding we need because some junior frats and their poorly chosen leader couldn’t bother to show up on time.”

Kirsch rolls his eyes. “Dude, relax.”

She shuts her book, she wasn’t reading it anyway. “That’s what you told me to do when I told you to book the car wash for last Saturday.”

“Yeah, and I messed up, but whatever. It’s all good now.” He brings down a finger on the edge of his pencil eraser, flipping it up a few times. “Besides, we were gonna do it at the gas station—”

Danny interjects, “But since somebody forgot to even ask their permission to hold a car wash—”

“But since I made an honest mistake,” He grumbles, “They didn’t wanna do it tomorrow, so a buddy of mine who works at Taco Bell got us a slot there. And it’s gonna be like, way nicer. He says
they’ll even give us free drinks, since it’s like, a volunteer thing.”

She’s doesn’t really have a lot of comeback material to work with, so Danny drops it and sighs. “Can I get back to my book, please?”

“Oh, no, actually just one more thing.” He looks down and frowns. “Dude, are you just reading a textbook?”

“It’s required reading.”

“Still.”

“Kirsch, what do you want?”

He scratches the back of his neck. “Do I need to bring anything? Like signs to advertise or whatever?”

Danny gets the brief mental image of Kirsch holding up car wash signs with backwards ‘R’s. Against her better judgement, she nods. “Yeah, that’d be good, I guess.”

He smiles proudly, like he knows he’s thought of something she hasn’t, but he must be feeling generous because he doesn’t say anything about it.

“Oh, and uh. Good job at your track thing or whatever. That was pretty cool.”

Danny smiles.

Just a little.

It’s not a big smile.

“Thanks.”

—

“Hey, Perr?” LaFontaine leans towards their girlfriend, never taking their eyes off the couple standing by the language building. “Laura’s birthday is next Saturday, right?”

Perry folds her legs underneath her and takes something out of their joint lunchbox. “Mhm.”

“Twenty bucks they hook up by her birthday.”

“What?”

LaF looks over at her and nods towards the building. “Laura and Carmilla.”

Perry frowns, following their line of sight. Carmilla is against the wall, the side of her head leaning against the brick while she looks down at Laura. Laura is laughing and drinking something out of a water bottle. She offers it to Carmilla, who makes a comment before drinking out of it. She hands it back, Laura says something, and Carmilla rolls her eyes, the smile never leaving her face as she does so.

LaFontaine shakes their head. “Look at them. Disgusting.”

“They look like us.” Perry gives them a sly smile and drinks out of her thermos.
“Twenty bucks, Perr, what do you say?”

She scoffs and digs a plastic container and a fork from the box. “We can’t place bets on when our friends are going to date, Laura hasn’t even worked out her sexuality yet.” LaFontaine isn’t convinced, but Perry persists. “It’s an invasion of her privacy.”

Yeah, they aren’t buying it. There’s more to that, behind Perry’s wall of manners and delicacy.

“Besides.”

And there it is.

“Her birthday is in a week, there’s not nearly enough time for them to get together.”

A bag drops to the left of them and suddenly Danny is there, frowning at an apple. “Can you believe they’re out of bananas today? They’re never out of bananas.” She’s still pouting at her apple, which is probably an athlete thing because LaFontaine recognizes it as the same thing Jesse used to do whenever something got in the way of his diet during swim season. “What are we talking about?”

Perry rolls her eyes. “It’s all very childish, LaFontaine is trying to guess if Laura and Carmilla are going to... you know, get together.”

“Oh, I’m not guessing, and it’s not about ‘if’, it’s ‘when’.”

Danny nods. “With you there.” She takes a bite from her apple and chews deliberately. “Who says they aren’t together already?”

LaFontaine looks to Perry, who looks to Danny, who looks back to them with a confident shrug. They all look across the quad to Laura, who’s showing Carmilla something on her phone. Carmilla laughs and Laura never looks away from Carmilla.

“No.”

“They - no no no, they couldn’t be.”

Danny shrugs. “They could be. We know Mistress of the Snark over there is smitten, but Laura’s not exactly the patron saint of personal space.”

LaFontaine shakes their head while Laura reaches up to get something out of Carmilla’s bangs. “No way.”

Perry agrees, “No, Laura would tell us.”

Danny takes another bite and stretches out her legs on the grass. “Maybe she would, maybe she wouldn’t. She knows we don’t really like Carmilla.”

“We don’t dislike her.”

“We apologized.”

“They’ve been spending a lot of time together.” Danny says, just as Laura points to the cafeteria and ushers Carmilla to join her. “Sleepovers? Study dates? Long walks? Any of that ring a bell?”

LaF opens their bag of chips as Carmilla holds the cafeteria door for Laura and they slip behind the tinted windows of the caf. “Guess we’ll find out soon. I’m still putting my money on her birthday.”
Perry takes another sip from the thermos. LaFontaine hopes it’s Mountain Dew, but Perry packed lunch today so it’s probably Capri Sun. They can still hope, though. She sets down the thermos with a sigh, “I give them a month. Fifteen dollars.”

“That’s what I’m talkin’ about.” LaFontaine picks up the thermos and yep, it’s Capri Sun.

Fruit punch, which is like, their least favorite flavor. But Perry likes it.

Danny tosses the remains of her apple into a paper bag. “Put me down for ten dollars that they’re already together.” She pauses. “No, wait. Ten dollars, they’ve kissed but aren’t dating yet.”

“But how do we know who wins, it’s not like we can just ask.”

LaFontaine considers it, but it's Danny who speaks up.

"When she comes out to us, she'll tell us. Or we can ask, after the fact."

That satisfies Perry, and LaFontaine smiles between them. “Game on.”

“This is still so childish.”

—

Carmilla has a bad habit of fidgeting in class. Her hands almost never stay still, especially since she finished her book in AP Lit and forgot to bring a second one. She fiddles with her bracelets, turning them over her wrist, tapping against the studs and the beads of each different piece. Her pen twirls around the delicate fingers of her free hand while she thinks. Fidgeting. Pretty bad habit. She usually finds it annoying when anybody else does it, but it's not her fault that high school has a bad habit of being boring as fuck.

Laura drops herself in the seat next to Carmilla half a second before the final bell rings. It doesn't even phase Beckett, who hasn't moved from his seat and probably won't for another ten minutes.

This is the only class where Carmilla doesn't mind his usual negligence towards their education.

Laura slumps a little in her seat, dropping her chin into her hand. Her eyes gloss over while she watches the pen spin around Carmilla’s fingers.

She looks at Laura.

(This is, of course, a blanket statement. There are few times when they're together that she isn't looking at Laura.)

"You good there, sweetheart?" Laura doesn't make any motion to suggest that she heard a single word of her greeting. Carmilla leans forward into her line of sight. "Laura?"

"Hmm?" Laura blinks. "Yeah, I'm— I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

She smiles a little and lets out a sarcastic "Gee, thanks."

“Yeah, anytime.” Her genuine tone drags another smile from Laura’s lips. Carmilla pulls a notebook out of her bag, flipping it open to the doodle she’d spent her entire free period working on — a caricature of their very rude and very Russian lunch lady, who had yelled at the both of them, but mostly Laura. Laura is young, and this is only her second year at Silas. Most upperclassmen know
not to throw away cafeteria food in front of the staff, or in the caf, or anywhere near the staff or the caf.

Big Lottie takes her mystery meat very seriously.

Carmilla would have thrown it away, too. There are certain colors that should never be attributed to anything resembling a meat product. She digs around the bottom of her bag in search of her black and red felt tip pens.

She saves those for the particularly insulting sketches.

When she shifts her hand, Laura must see the drawing because a laugh bubbles out of her involuntarily. “You didn’t have to do that.” But she looks grateful and a little happier, so she contradicts herself because now Carmilla’s glad she did.

She shrugs. “Nobody likes Big Lottie, anyway.”

“I get the idea the feeling is mutual.” Laura tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and takes a shaky breath. Which is dangerous, very very dangerous, because this isn’t the first or the second time she’s seen Laura cry, but it always inevitably starts with that same heartbreaking breath.

“Alright, I’m gonna regret this, but... what’s wrong?”

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe that I got yelled at for not eating my lunch by a very grumpy Russian lady that’s about two feet taller than me? And we were in the middle of a huge cafeteria, so pretty much everybody heard it and they all probably think I’m so stupid for trying to throw away food in front of the lunch lady, which, in hindsight, I totally am. And...” With a pout, she shrugs and looks down. “And I’m still really hungry but I pretty much can’t ever step foot in that cafeteria ever again.”

She wants to frown but she can’t, because Laura is already pouting and that means two people pouting instead of one. She knows Laura well enough — she has watched the Notebook with her, albeit begrudgingly — and she knows Laura is already the kind of person who cries when somebody else does. A frown isn’t going to do her any good, so Carmilla squeezes her lips together and forces a half smile while she imagines getting the lunch lady fired.

In a world where her mother was anyone but her mother, she might have been able to request that sort of thing.

She pulls a snickers bar from her bag and holds it up in front of Laura, who doesn’t even notice. “It’s just— it’s so stupid, I don’t even know why I’m upset, really. I guess I’m not very good at being yelled at.”

Carmilla has absolutely no idea what to do about the tears forming in Laura’s eyes, so she just sets down the chocolate bar and nudges it closer.

It takes a few seconds for her to notice it and she blinks back tears before shaking her head. “No, I’m fine, don’t—”

“Take it.”

“What if you get hungry?”

“I didn’t throw away my lunch, cupcake.”

Laura gives her a lopsided smile, the one that tugs on her heartstrings in all the right ways. Or the
wrong ways. That’s still to be determined. “Thanks.”

Across the room, one of the Zetas cheer when the short blond beefcake manages to stick one of the pencils in the roof’s tiling. Beckett stands from his chair with a bark — either an order or a scolding. Carmilla isn’t paying enough attention to know, nor does she care about anything but the girl sniffling softly beside her.

Laura slips the candy into her bag. “I’ll eat it after class.”

Carmilla adds little devil horns to accentuate the forked tongue on her masterpiece. Laura picks up her own purple pen, adding a barbed tail in bright, glittery gel pen. It feels too much like a metaphor for her own life, but she ignores that. Laura’s hand stays against hers while she colors in the vein popping on Big Lottie’s forehead.

They both jump when Beckett drops a crate of something against the table. The class lets out a groan and it only intensifies when he sets another box next to it, a packaged product. Condoms. Carmilla wonders briefly if it’s too late to skip this class.

“Alright, you know what today is.” Beckett drums his hands against the crate. “First, you learned how to take care of a baby, which went... tragically. Then, the majority of you failed the consequent exam on said baby. Because nobody studied, which scares me. Before me, I see twenty-four future parents.” He nods. “It’s why I have nightmares. But today, we learn how to prevent pregnancy. Please pay attention.”

Carmilla scoffs and returns to her sketch. There really needs to be some kind of test-out system in this class.

Laura leans in and whispers close enough so Carmilla can hear, which is probably the textbook definition of a little too close. “Talk about heteronormativity at it’s finest.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“Tables of two will make this easy. If you’re in a left seat, look to your right. You are looking at your current sexual partner.”

Carmilla glances at Laura, who lets out something between a giggle and a gasp.

Beckett holds up a banana. “This, ladies and gentlemen, is your...” He sighs. “Disco stick, if you will.”

—

“Oh my.”

LaFontaine chuckles and bumps their shoulder with Perry’s. “Talk about a waste of a class for us, huh?”

Mr. Beckett starts to pass out bananas and assigns the box of condoms to an enthusiastic Zeta who starts to toss the packages at people.

“Well, we should still pay attention, you never know.”

They raise an eyebrow. “Uh. You got somethin’ you’re not telling me?” Mr. Beckett drops a banana on their table and they wait until he passes to pick it up. “I mean we’re not exactly intimate but I’m at least 200 percent sure that neither of us are hiding one of these.” They wave it around a little and
Perry puts up a hand to push it back down.

“You know what I mean. On the off chance that... you ever—” Her sentence is cut off by a condom that nearly hits her in the face. It lands an inch from the edge of the table and she scoffs, probably at the nerve of the boy handing them out.

“Perr. Put the condom on the banana and please never finish that sentence.”

She huffs. “Fine.”

LaFontaine points the banana towards her as she unwarps the condom. They both cringe because, well — condoms were never meant to go on fruits and nobody ever really enjoys sex ed. With the instructions that Mr. Beckett projects on the board, they apply it without too much trouble.

LaFontaine is about to make a joke about Perry of all people learning how to use a condom when their train of thought is interrupted by Mr. Beckett’s slow clapping from the back of the room. The room goes silent as they watch him stop and pick up two bananas — one from Danny’s table, and across the aisle, one from Kirsch’s.

“Brody and Danny.” He nods, inspecting the bananas. Both have condoms stretched from the base to the tip and LaFontaine can’t even look at it for more than ten seconds. Too weird. “In less than 60 seconds. I have to say, I’m impressed and a little bit concerned. For the sake of my mental health, I’m going to assume you’re fast learners.”

Kirsch puts on a cocky grin and earns a few high fives from his friends while Danny launches into a rant about slut shaming that falls, for the most part, on deaf ears.

“Tell you one thing.” LaFontaine taps the empty condom wrapper. “I don’t think I’m gonna be eating bananas for a while.”

—

"Did I really just hear him say the words 'disco stick'?” Carmilla nearly whines, like it's an incredible inconvenience to her to sit through this particular activity, much less listen to Mr. Beckett try to use outdated slang.

Although, now that she thinks about it, Laura doubts the term 'disco stick' was ever really in.

"I'm afraid so." Laura rotates the banana in her hand.

Carmilla leans her head against her propped up hand and watches Laura. She really hopes her stupid insecurities aren't written all over her face. Laura's about ninety-percent sure she didn't actually cry, just some sniffling, but she's self-conscious enough as it is when Carmilla looks at her like this on a good day.

She sighs dramatically and plucks the fruit from Laura's hand. "I suppose it could have been worse." Carmilla glances between Laura and the banana. "He could have called it a Python of Love."

"Ew, no thanks." Laura shakes her head, but finds herself laughing at the same time. A look flashes across Carmilla's face — something between hope and happiness.

She tosses the banana into the air and catches it after a series of flips. "Or a tally wacker."

Laura groans. "Oh, God."
"Sperm maker."

"Please stop."

"Hammer of Thor."

"Never associate my favorite superheroes with body parts again."

"Cocktapus."

Laura shakes with laughter and she can almost feel her bad mood slipping away. "Okay, okay, hold on, give me a sec." She takes the banana like it's one of the talking sticks Perry sometimes passes around at GSA meetings, except this time they're not sharing experiences, they're coming up with slang terms for the male anatomy. Which isn't even like, the weirdest conversation they've ever had. "What about... doinker?"

"That all you got?" Carmilla crosses her arms, which causes a bit of a ripple in the way her muscles tighten. She doesn't really wear t-shirts often, something Laura only noticed for the first time when she saw how nice Carmilla's arms could be.

"Um, pee pee?" She offers with a shrug.

"That's weak. Baloney pony."

How does she come up with these? Honestly.

"... Dongle?"

"Womb raider." She shoots back, like it's been on the tip of her tongue since the moment they started this exchange.

"Oh my God, no, I give up." Laura drops the banana and shakes her head. She's smiling — a lot, which she guesses was Carmilla's goal in all of this because she looks a bit more relaxed now that Laura isn't on the verge of tears.

Total softie. It's cute sometimes.

"Come on, you didn't even let me get to custard launcher."

Laura cringes. "God, I am so never gonna be able to eat another banana in my life."

Carmilla nods. "They're overrated anyway." She slides both the banana and the condom across the table. "What do you say, cutie? Why don't you do the honors?"

"You should know I'm not that kind of girl. At least take me to dinner first." Laura giggles at her own joke — she'd been waiting to make it since the second Mr. Beckett had presented the box of condoms. "But why do I have to do it?"

"You'll certainly need it more than I do."

"You don't know that."

Carmilla throws her thumbs up, pointing at herself. "Lesbian repulsed by penises." She points at Laura. "Inexperienced heterosexual. You do the math, sweetheart."

Laura laughs because there's nothing else to do, really. She isn't entirely comfortable underneath
Carmilla's gaze. She shouldn't have to do all the work herself, and frankly all this labeling is a bit unnecessary.

"But—" Laura chews on her lip for a moment. "You don't know that you'll *never* need to know how to use a condom."

"I really do, though."

"Yeah, you might think that *now*, but who knows? You should be prepared. Because sexuality is totally fluid and sometimes you think you're one thing but then you meet someone and you feel all these things and it turns out that maybe you're not that one thing, maybe you're something else entirely and, and that could happen to you. And if it does, that's okay because everyone should feel free to act on those kinds of... urges."

Where the hell did that come from? She doesn't really have the time to consider it, because Carmilla is giving her that look she gets sometimes when Laura goes on a particularly lengthy rant about something that Carmilla could care less about. Laura laughs it off. "But. You can't experiment if you don't know how to have safe sex!"

Carmilla just rolls her eyes. "Sweetheart?"

"Yeah?"

"Put the condom on the banana."

Her shoulders slump — this is officially a lost cause. "Fine."

The condom feels strange in her hands. The latex is a little cold. Was Mr. Beckett keeping these in the refrigerator? Did condoms have to be kept in the refrigerator? Wouldn't that be the opposite of helpful, like a sudden cold shower? She makes a mental note to look it up online later.

Apparently Carmilla is still watching her attempt to unroll this thing. "Squeeze the tip."

Laura stares blankly at her.

"Obviously it makes no difference on a banana, but you have to when it's time for the real thing." She shrugs. "You don't want an air pocket in the end of it."

"Oh." She nods, and manages to clumsily roll the rest of the condom on while squeezing the tip of it. Laura spends at least 80 percent of her condom application process trying not to imagine a real penis because that's just really weird. Her brain only catches on a moment later. "How did you know that?"

"I have a little brother, remember? God knows my Mother wasn't going to have that talk with him."

Laura laughs, it's more than a little strange to imagine the school principal having the sex talk with anybody. "So who taught you, then?"

"Not that hard to do a google search. And I may have dabbled in a few hands-on experiments with... friends." Her gaze is piercing and Laura looks down.

She swallows. "My Dad never really gave me the sex talk either. I think he still sees me as a little kid sometimes."

"So where did you learn?"
"Honestly? Fanfiction.net."

Carmilla laughs that pretty laugh that Laura loves. "Why am I not surprised?"

—

LaFontaine is pretty sure they’ve never in their life seen a class so excited for a school-wide assembly — they’re standard and a total bore if they’re being honest — but when Mr. Beckett announces that class is over ten minutes early, it takes less than a minute for even the laziest students to vacate their seats, leaving stray bananas and condoms in their wake.

The lecture itself wasn’t much better than the hands on portion of the class.

They lose track of Perry in the crowd almost immediately and LaFontaine curses whichever clumsy football player got between them. LaFontaine is short and everyone else is so tall and they don’t see Perry’s hair bobbing anywhere in the crowd on the way to the auditorium.

Their phone vibrates in their jacket pocket.

**Care Perr (2:27pm):** *Come to the band room.*

**Oh.**

LaFontaine smiles, ducking behind a group of teenage anarchists chanting about why everyone should skip the assembly. Something about laughing in the face of totalitarianism. They could care less. It only takes a few seconds to slip into the back hallway.

**My Person <3 (2:28pm):** *are you asking me to cut class to make out with you in the band room?*

**Care Perr (2:28pm):** *It’s not class, it’s an assembly. Are you coming or not?*

**My Person <3 (2:28pm):** *Already on my way.*

—

“Perr?” LaFontaine shuts the door behind them until they hear the metallic click lock into place. The room is empty, save for a class set of chairs and music stands. The light is on and every chair is aligned in perfect rows. They smile — Perry is definitely in here.

The cross the room and peek inside the locker room. LaF double checks that their trombone is still there because things tend to just go missing around Silas without any explanation, although they suspect the suspiciously high crime rates and faulty locks probably have a significant impact. Their trombone is still there, Perry is not.

LaFontaine almost jumps when they feel a pair of arms snake their way around their waist. Perry is kissing their neck and if it was physically possible to frown with Perry wrapped around them, they would try to feign some kind of scandalized shock.

That’s a joke they’ll have to save for another day.

Perry presses a kiss to their cheek and they lift a hand to hold hers against their stomach. “The entire school is in the auditorium right now.”

LaFontaine smiles and leans back into the embrace.
“Yeah? And how’d I get lucky enough for you to skip a mandatory assembly for me?”

The neck kissing stops and they almost pout. “For your information, I happen to have written this presentation.”

“I’m sure it’s riveting.”

“Ms. Dall gave me permission to skip it so I could spend time catching up on my chemistry homework.”

LaFontaine spins to face her and slips a hand behind Perry’s neck, their fingers losing themselves in her curls. They kiss her, completely forgetting to deliver the punchline they had just thought of. Perry pulls back to shut the locker room door behind them and they remember the joke.

“Chemistry homework, is that my new nickname?”

She shakes her head and reaches for their hand. Their fingers interlock without a thought, just a force of habit. “I knew you’d make that joke.”

“It’s a pretty great joke.”

“You always make that joke.”

Perry pulls her hands back so she can run her fingers through LaFontaine’s hair — which for the record, is a really spectacular cause — while they kiss. She holds them by strands of hair tucked around her fingers when she says, “You have a lot of making up to do.”

It’s hard to talk while Perry is leaving a trail of kisses down their jaw with that wide smile of hers, but they manage it. “Oh? For what?”

LaFontaine lands a peck against Perry’s lips.

“Last weekend.”

A chill racks through them, hard, fast, and heavy. Perry has to notice, because she amends her statement immediately. “You were so busy, we barely saw each other.”

Yeah, that doesn’t really slow down their heartbeat, but they smile and kiss Perry again. “I know, Saturday was kind of weird, my parents—”

“I know, I know. It’s not your fault.”

They aren’t sure that’s entirely true.

“With parents like yours, it’s never your fault.”

That’s definitely not true.

“But. I have absolutely no desire to kiss your father, so I’m afraid you’ll have to be the one who makes up for it. Since my parents were, you know—” Perry shakes her head. “Just. Brunch wasn’t usually what it is.”

They struggle to come up with the perfect thing to say. It’s kind of their thing when Perry starts to worry. “I kind of liked what happened after brunch.”

(Any day with that much cuddling is a victory in their book.)
Maybe it’s not the perfect thing to say, all things considered, but it does the trick because Perry smiles again.

“Are you going to kiss me or not?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

(Her kisses are sticky, which means they’re going to have to wipe off a lot of lipstick in about an hour. But it’s more than worth it.)

—

Nine times. Danny has rolled her eyes nine times since she sat down in the auditorium, a number she usually doesn’t reach unless she’s spending an extended period of time with someone from the football team, or as of lately — Carmilla. Carmilla when she’s with Laura is borderline revolting. Carmilla when she’s without Laura is arguably worse for a lot of reasons, most of them pathetic. She almost prefers the height jokes to the longing looks across the quad.

Eye rolling. It’s a necessity. But Danny is on the verge of straining a muscle here with this constant flow of after school special quotes on the dangers of cyberbullying.

Whoever put this powerpoint together really needs somebody to tell them that they aren’t living in the 90’s anymore. Nobody sends e-mails that consist solely of the words ‘u r dumb’, she doubts she could even find a computer that still runs Windows 95, and even Laura gave up her ancient flip phone last summer when her Dad found out he could put a location tracking app on her iPhone. Danny wouldn’t be surprised if Laura was the last person on earth to own a phone that old. This presentation is outdated and a waste of her time.

She scans the room for LaFontaine and Perry, but they must be sitting somewhere behind her because she can’t see them.

She really picked the wrong spot to sit in.

Laura and Carmilla are whispering something to each other about four rows down, sitting closer than either of them probably realize. Danny tilts her head, wondering if Carmilla is waiting for the moment that Laura realizes she isn’t straight or if she’s just as oblivious as Laura.

She’s still not entirely convinced that they haven’t kissed already. Danny had her first kiss at an innocent sleepover too, and Laura couldn’t stop gushing about all the fun they had when Carmilla stayed the night. Danny won’t ask, she knows how terrifying it is to be asked something like that when she couldn’t even answer her own questions yet. She cares about Laura more than she cares about winning some bet with LaFontaine.

Even though she still kind of wants to win. Winning is her thing.

She manages to zone out for a few minutes — she has a lot to think about. The car wash, for one. It’s kind of a big deal, even though Kirsch and the other Zetas don’t seem to think so. Of course they don’t, the football team never has to worry about team funding. She’s pretty sure they pay for the football jerseys at this school long before they invest in textbooks. Meanwhile, the track team — which consists of mostly the Summer Society girls — struggles to raise enough money each year for team hoodies, despite their constant winning streak.

It’s sexist and totally stereotypical of a school system to prioritize which students get an opportunity to be a part of a well financed team. The car wash is their main source of funding for this season.
Her eyes are beginning to gloss over when the presentation changes to the beginning of a second powerpoint, because clearly the first one was just Not Enough. Out of the corner of her eye she sees a hand waving and Kirsch trying to get her attention from two rows down and across the aisle. He flashes her a smile when he catches her eye and holds up a fist.

Danny frowns and tries to twist her face into the sort of facial expression that accurately says: *I recognize that you're trying to communicate, but I actually don't speak idiot.*

He brings his fist down against his palm a few times and mouths something that she understands.


She rolls her eyes — that makes ten. He looks really excited. Kirsch keeps his fist in the air until she gives in, rolling her eyes in the other direction now.

He smiles and nods in a way that she can actually hear the word *Dude* telepathically and they both bring their fists down a few times.

Kirsch puts up rock, Danny chooses scissors. He makes the scissors sign with his left hand and crushes them with his right.

She locks her jaw and narrows her eyes.


He throws up rock again, losing to her paper. Danny leans back in her chair, pushing her hair back with a smirk.

*Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot.* His rock defeats her scissors — and someone certainly has a go-to.

*Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot.* Her paper defeats his rock.

*Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot.* Her paper defeats his rock.

Really?

*Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot.* She doesn’t even mind when his scissors defeat her paper because at least if he wins a little it’s less boring than this assembly. He looks proud of himself, though. Too proud for somebody who only won two rounds. She beats him a few more times after that, not as much as she might have liked.

It’s actually a great alternative to ignoring the presentation, or it is until a teacher she doesn’t recognize moves to catch her attention and with a subtle shake of her head, stops the both of them in their tracks. Kirsch sinks deep into his seat just as she does, returning to the world’s longest dissertation on the dangers of cyberbullying.

Danny checks the time on her watch and sighs. That only wasted eight minutes. She clocks in minute number nine with her twelfth eye roll.

—

"Hey, shouldn't your Mom be doing this presentation?"

Carmilla feels every muscle in her body tense for a fraction of a second but no, she had already searched the auditorium for Mother before sitting next to Laura in the third row.
Laura leans in closer — which isn't at all necessary — to whisper her explanation. "You know, since it's like a school-wide thing?"

Carmilla wills herself not to think about how nice Laura smells and she doesn't get a chance to even finish that thought before she fails miserably at it.

She waits for the teacher on stage to start speaking again so she can whisper back. "Please. Have you ever seen my mother do anything for this school besides hand out detention slips?"

Laura nods. "Fair point." Her lips could not possibly be any more than five inches from Carmilla's ear.

"Kinda wish it was your Mom, though."

Five inches is a stretch.

"I pretty much wish it was anyone but Ms. Dall, actually."

She has to admit that this presentation is beyond boring, but unlike Carmilla, Laura doesn't have the luxury of being frozen in place while a beautiful girl lingers near her neck.

Carmilla has actually become the character in every trashy television show that she hates the absolute most.

She nods. "A robot could likely give a more interesting presentation than this."

Laura's shoulder leans against hers while she tries not to laugh. "You could probably type this entire speech into google translator, have the computer read it back to you, and still get a better presentation."

Without really thinking about it, Carmilla glances down at Laura. She knows how close she is, but she doesn't really know until Laura blinks up at her and she can see the flecks of gold in her eyes and the way that the light reflects off of her lip gloss. Carmilla falters for a moment before her own smile takes over. "At least google translate has some grasp on the concept of inflection."

Laura doesn't seem bothered by their lack of distance, as if she acts this way around all of her friends. She probably does and Carmilla has to wonder how many of Laura's friends are completely wrapped around her finger.

A hand comes down on Carmilla's arm. "Seriously though, what's your Mom even like? You basically have a teacher for a parent."

"You basically have a police officer for a parent."

Laura rolls her eyes. "Trust me, I'm aware. At least you don't have to hear about the daily dangers of Austin over the dinner table every night. Oh God, please tell me you don't have to hear about dress codes and school funding all the time."

Carmilla shakes her head and picks at the fray of her jeans with the hand that Laura doesn't have pinned down still. "No, she never talks about school stuff with me. Even if I ask. It's all a bit more exciting than that at my house."

It's not a lie.

"You're lucky, my Dad never shuts up about his job."
Carmilla bites her tongue.

"Speaking of which," Laura takes her hand back in favor of wiping her palms on the front of her shorts. "I was wondering if we could maybe hang out sometime, somewhere besides my house? I mean I'm kind of running out of ideas of stuff we could do and—"

"I don't mind your house."

"Yeah, but all we ever do is watch movies together."

"You have a lot of movies."

There's a lull in the presentation as Ms. Dall struggles with flipping from one slide to the next and the room erupts in whispers. Laura waits until the volume around them reaches a certain point before she talks again, out of her whisper.

"I feel like everything we do is about me, though. You know pretty much everything there is to know about me, I don't even know what you do for fun." Laura's hands run through her hair, pulling it to one side of her neck.

Carmilla grins and she knows she's won Laura over before she even speaks. "You know what I do for fun, I go to your house."

Laura smiles, but drops it. This is usually her saving grace, where most people give her an out and she takes it and runs.

Laura has never been most people.

"You could come by the music shop where I work. It's almost always empty." That might even be an understatement, she hasn't seen a customer in days. It's a miracle the place hasn't gone bankrupt yet.

Laura nods eagerly. "Yeah, that sounds really cool. When do you work?"

Carmilla shrugs with a flick of her wrist. "Pretty much whenever I want. Shonda doesn't really need me there, she just hates customer service. And I happen to know everything there is to know about the only instrument she doesn't play." Laura looks impressed by that, which makes Carmilla's heart soar with something — pride, she thinks. It's not a familiar feeling. "Anyway, I just show up and she pays me. I'm working tonight, if you want to come by?"

"Yeah, I'd love to."

Carmilla nods and bites her lip. "Cool."

"So, what instrument do you play?"

"Can't tell you that."

"Why not?" Laura pouts and Carmilla almost gives in then and there.

"Well, I have to keep some of my secrets. Otherwise I'll lose my air of mystery, won't I?"

—

After the assembly and their bus ride home — which consisted mostly of Laura trying to guess
which instrument Carmilla plays, each guess growing more ridiculous by the minute — Laura waits a respectable two hours before asking her Dad to drive her to the music shop. She double checks the address that Carmilla had scribbled onto a scrap of paper and pressed into her hand just as she got off the bus. She definitely has the right shop and she was definitely invited this time. She had checked. Twice. She would have checked a third time if it weren’t for the hurt look on Carmilla’s face when she asked again, meaning she’s still probably embarrassed about what happened at her house. Laura is too. But mostly she just really doesn’t want to see that look again because she hates it when Carmilla’s hurt.

Even when it’s a silly banjo injury.

She folds the piece of paper and slips it into her back pocket before she turns to give her dad a salute — it’s dorky, but he returns it before driving away.

The door sticks a little bit when she tries to open it, like it needs to loosen a screw or two. If that’s even what’s done with doors that need fixing, she doesn’t have a clue. Maybe she just needs to put on some muscle. The bell on the door rings but it echoes through the mostly empty shop.

It’s a lot bigger than she pictured it. If she had succeeded in getting Carmilla to watch Doctor Who with her last week, she could have made a bigger-on-the-inside joke. The front counter is in an L-shape, wrapping around a wall that she can’t see behind. Laura hears music — something nice. She weaves her way through the shelves of records and instruments to find Carmilla sitting at a piano bench underneath a row of guitars over her head. Her fingers fly over the keyboard and she’s playing something that Laura doesn’t recognize.

Which is, by the way, quite the feat. Being Lola Perry’s friend usually means that has has at one point been forced to listen to every song known to mankind. And she owns at least four playlists from each decade — generous gifts from the most obsessive lover of music she has ever had the pleasure of befriending. She can’t imagine how LaFontaine lives with that.

But this is a new song, or maybe it’s a very old song, the point is: she doesn’t recognize it. It’s almost as beautiful as the girl playing it.

The first thing Laura really notices is her clothes. Carmilla was wearing a black and red t-shirt in class, but she must have changed. She cringes and does a once over of her own clothes. She’s still wearing the same shorts and t-shirt she wore to school and she tugs at the hem of her shirt, suddenly feeling underdressed.

Carmilla looks completely out of her element playing a melody like this — clad in purple plaid and leather pants, her hair tossed into a bun. Laura’s been meaning to ask her for days if she learned how to put it up that way in some kind of YouTube tutorial because Laura still hasn’t mastered anything fancy past a nice looking ponytail. No matter what Carmilla does with her hair it just kind of seems to work.

Her back is still to Laura and she’s focused on the music. Despite the mirrors on the walls, she doesn’t notice her step closer. She doesn’t want Carmilla to stop playing, but she remembers what happened the last time that she tried to surprise her. That didn’t go so well and Laura would really not like to repeat that. She clears her throat.

“I come bearing gifts.”

The piano stops and it’s a shame that it does, but Carmilla spins around on the wooden bench with half a smile on her face. “Didn’t think you were coming.”
“Yeah, I know. I’m a little late.” She regrets waiting so long now. “Buuut...” Laura waves the bag of taco bell between them and closes the space between her and the bench. “I picked up dinner.”

“I knew there was a reason I kept you around.” She swings a leg over the bench to straddle it, taking the bag from Laura’s hands while she searches for a stool to sit on.

Laura drags a chair from the wall next to a door labeled ‘Employees Only’ and sets herself up across from Carmilla. She still feels like a bit of a wreck in comparison because now she can see that Carmilla touched up her make-up, meanwhile Laura can’t even remember if she brushed her hair on the way out the door.

Carmilla looks perfect, as usual, even when she’s inhaling a crunch wrap supreme in three bites or less. Laura takes the burrito she bought for herself, a combo burrito, because she’s determined to test out everything on the taco bell menu now that Carmilla keeps insisting they go there at least twice a week. She rotates the burrito in her hand and chews on the inside of her cheek as the thought suddenly strikes her — why doesn’t Carmilla have a girlfriend?

Carmilla would probably laugh if she knew Laura was thinking about this while she watches her devour fast food, but it’s a fairly solid question. She’s like, unfairly pretty. And probably way too smart for her age. And funny. Really funny, especially on her good days.

Laura is pretty sure that if she was gay, she’d totally want to date Carmilla. It’s like what Sandra was saying about her best friend, the idea isn’t repulsive. But considering she isn’t actually gay and Carmilla is in no way interested in her, she pushes the thought aside and takes a bite out of her burrito.

Not bad. Not as good as the crunchy taco, but not so bad. She doesn’t really like the soft shell stuff. It feels heavier in her mouth.

She swallows and kicks at Carmilla’s boot with her own converse. “So, are you coming to the car wash thing tomorrow?”

“To wash my extravagant collection of cars? Why wouldn’t I?”

“Haha.” Laura almost believes her for half a second because she has seen her house and extravagant is surprisingly accurate. “C’mon, it’ll be fun. My Dad’s gonna be there to supervise, Danny and Kirsch are probably gonna try to kill each other at least twice—”

“Pay to see that.” Carmilla says with a grin.

“Perry is gonna lose her mind because nobody’s gonna follow the schedule, LaFontaine is probably gonna use science to wash the cars in some kind of super turbo wash thing—”

“Still don’t see why I would want to come. In fact,” She brushes some crumbs off of her pants, “Why are they even coming, isn’t this a jock thing?”

“Yeah, well, we kind of do everything together. The track team really needs the funding and unless you feel like maybe hinting to your Mom that they could use a little more money, it’s kind of our only option.”

Carmilla looks like the idea pains her, and it probably does, considering Danny has to be on her list of top five least favorite people on earth, and definitely does not qualify for special favors from Carmilla.

“And you should come,” Laura reaches across the bench to pick up Carmilla’s hand, swinging it
between them. “Because I’m gonna be there. Also, I’m pretty sure the car wash is happening in the Taco Bell parking lot.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes but smiles and nods. “Fine. What time?”

“Eleven.” Laura grins, biting her lip to contain the smile.

“Eleven.”

Laura takes back her hand so Carmilla can pull another crunch wrap from the bag.

“So, is this the mysterious instrument you play?” She places a firm pat on top of the piano.

Carmilla swallows the bite she took and shakes her head. “No, this is Shonda’s piano. I just play it sometimes. I, uh, I play more than one instrument.”

“Oh.”

In case she needed to feel just a little more incompetent.

“Well, since I brought you dinner, can I know what else you play?”

Carmilla grins in that way that Laura knows she’s trying not to grin but can’t help it. Her stomach growls at her and she takes a bite of her burrito, counting each chew until Carmilla speaks up. She reaches seven before Carmilla runs a hand down the side of her pants and looks up.

“Piano’s just a hobby. I’ve been playing since I was six, but I prefer bass guitar.”

Laura slaps her knee. “Bass guitar. Why didn’t I guess that? I can totally see it now.”

“It’s okay, you guessed guitar on the bus. I play acoustic, bass, and electric.” She shrugs. “Perks of the job.”

Laura adds that to the list of things Carmilla is unnecessarily good at.

“I’m not very good on the drums yet, but I’m learning.”

“You know, you should totally be in the marching band.”

Laura laughs at herself before Carmilla even gets the chance to because, wow, what a visual.

“Not really my kind of gig, sunshine.”

“Yeah, didn’t really think that one through.” Laura shakes her head. “But, you’re really good on the piano, by the way.”

Carmilla nods like she’s either heard this her entire life or couldn’t care less. Perhaps it’s both. “I’m better on guitar.”

“Can you play something for me?”

She doesn’t say a word, just smiles but shakes her head no.

“Oh, come on. It’s almost my birthday, consider it a present.”

Something flashes across her face, a familiar look that Laura could probably place had it lasted for more than a second. She blinks and it’s gone, replaced by a casual smile. “Nice try.”
Laura pouts the way she does for her Dad when she wants something she knows she’s going to get. “At least play me something on the piano, that was really nice. What was it, anyway? I didn’t recognize it.” She scoots the chair closer to the stool.

Carmilla finishes off the last bite of her crunch wrap and wipes her mouth. The bag of wrappers is tossed into a garbage bin on the floor, and Laura tosses the remainder of her burrito with it, may it rest in peace. She definitely prefers the crunchy taco.

“It’s not a song you’d know.” Carmilla swings her leg back to sit properly at the bench and gives Laura enough room to slide up next to her.

She does, bumping her shoulder into Carmilla’s. “Hipster.”

“Composer,” She corrects.

“Oh. Wow, you wrote that?”

She only shrugs. “Like I said. Hobby.”

Laura laughs, almost in disbelief, except it’s actually not all that hard to believe since this is Carmilla. Her fingers rest against the keys for a moment before they start to move effortlessly across them. It doesn’t go unnoticed by Laura that there’s no sheet music in front of her and Carmilla smiles at her, which is borderline intimidating. Laura can’t even look at anyone while she’s playing the flute without missing a note or going sharp, and here Carmilla is smiling at her, looking at her, and Laura wants to give her a rubix cube or something to see if she can solve that while playing too. She looks like she was born for this, born for making music and playing music, born for sitting next to Laura in this shop and frankly, impressing the hell out of her.

When she stops, Laura can only shake her head. “You know, you’re kind of incredible. I mean... I wish I was that good at something.”

“Well, aren’t you gonna be some fantastic journalist someday?”

Laura laughs and there’s not a trace of humor in it. Carmilla’s words from Monday come back to her. Stop it with the journalist crap. I’m not some story or piece for you to figure out. You’re just a child and you understand nothing. Not about life, not about this place — and certainly not about what it takes to survive in a world. So you know what? The sooner you stop playing Lois Lane, the better off you’ll be.

She had cried over those words, more than once. But it’s not fair for her to think that way. Carmilla was upset and she had totally crossed a line, they both had. And besides, Carmilla was still the same girl that had called her brave. The same girl that had held her hand in a pillow fort and told her in no uncertain terms to forget what her Dad thinks she can and can’t do.

She had cried over those words once, too.

Laura coughs to clear her throat. “Can’t really be a fantastic journalist without a story to report on. Or an audience. Or a camera crew, in fact.”

Carmilla lands a soft punch to Laura’s thigh, her knuckles lingering over her skin, just below the end of her shorts. “You’ll find your story.”
Laura makes him wait an extra half hour for Carmilla to show up before they head to the car wash. She isn’t exactly wearing proper car wash attire — jeans and long sleeve button-up, but Carmilla doesn’t really strike him as the volunteer type so maybe this is her first car wash. He doesn’t comment on it, he learned a long time ago to never comment on what a woman wears, it’s none of his business.

He gets ignored for the most part on the drive over. Carmilla and Laura already have at least a dozen jokes that he can’t understand and he’s stopped counting the number of times they laugh at him for not knowing what they’re talking about.

He isn’t totally sure about this, but he has a working theory that they’re speaking in some kind of code.

The kids clap him on the back when they step out of the cruiser — he has, at one event or another, supervised almost all of the students at Silas High, he’s sure. Laura gives him a hug and says “Thanks, Daddy,” before she and Carmilla run off to offer Danny their help.

Laura runs, Carmilla sort of leisurely strolls.

The boys are in speedos, something Laura had definitely not warned him about. It’s a bit of a shock, but he laughs it off because one of these days it has to sink in that High School kids are never going to stop surprising him.

He drops into a lawn chair next to Barb, offers her a smile.

“Mark, hey. Didn’t know you’d be coming.”

She offers him a pepsi from the cooler on the grass and he takes it.

“Oh, you know how it is with Laura. She always wants to help out at this kind of stuff.”

“She’s a good kid.”

He nods, takes a sip from his soda, and finds Laura in the crowd of students. There’s absolutely no order to the group. Perry is frantically attempting to take control of the situation — and failing. Laura and Carmilla are talking while Laura holds up two sponges. She offers her one but Carmilla shakes her head and feigns disinterest.

In the middle of the parking lot, Danny and Barb’s son, Kirsch, argue over one of the signs. They both look a little distracted, as teenagers do when they’re in various states of undress in public. Danny pointedly looks him in the eye and nowhere else, despite the skimpy speedos he and the rest of the football team are wearing. Kirsch gestures at himself and Danny puts her hand on her forehead, fixing him with a look that Mark decides he never wants to be on the receiving end of.

He leans over. “Did Kirsch tell you about the speedos?”

“Oh, all about it. Half an hour before we had to leave. I’m not sure why I was surprised.”

He nods, laughs, and wonders if Laura knew. But then again, she’s standing between at least four nearly naked attractive teenage boys, two of which are dripping wet, and she’s smiling up at Carmilla. He isn’t sure she even knows anyone else is in the parking lot.

Which probably means something.

At some point, LaFontaine initiates a hose fight which results in a very angry Perry. A few of the
football players cheer and start turning hoses on each other, gifting LaFontaine with what they call *honorary bro status*. She seems pleased with that, Perry is not.

No, not she. Mark squeezes his eyes shut for a second and shakes his head. No, Laura had explained this to him last night after Perry and LaFontaine left. The pronouns would be tricky to learn, but it made sense. He needed to learn them.

*They*, not she.

He knew about their situation at home, Laura had explained that, too. This was his chance to provide the safe space that he and Lily had wanted when they had Laura.

He sighs, fidgets with the rim of his soda can.

Lily would have been so much better at this.

—

It’s actually kind of a miracle that Laura manages to convince Carmilla to stay for the entire car wash. She barely does any work, which is okay. Her idea of manual labor is rolling up her sleeves and then spending a few hours sitting on the grass next to Laura’s Dad. Which is okay, too, because then Laura doesn’t have to feel so bad about neglecting her volunteer work to talk to Carm.

But she doesn’t leave. And that’s more than okay, too.

When most of the cars have long gone and Kirsch starts to pack up the signs and supplies, Carmilla taps her on the shoulder.

Laura turns to her. “Hey.”

“Did you have fun?”

“As much fun as you can washing cars,” She says with a shrug. “Did my Dad drive you nuts? He talks a lot.”

“I guess that runs in the family.” Carmilla slips her hands into her back pockets. “Listen, I got a text from Shonda, she needs me to do an extra shift tonight so... I should go.”

“Right, yeah, totally. Thanks for coming.”

Carmilla lets Laura hug her, and it’s like, *really* nice. For somebody who says she’s not a hugger, Carmilla is almost never the one to pull away first. Laura hooks her chin over her shoulder and they hold each other for a few moments. Part of her wonders if she feels totally disgusting to hug, considering her tank top is probably still damp from the second water war. Carmilla shows no signs of caring until LaFontaine passes them, coughing harshly and Laura swears she hears them say something like *okay* or *cake* between coughs, but neither of those really make any sense so she doesn’t worry about it.

Laura pulls back. “Right, so uh, have a good day at work. I’ll see you later?”

“Not if I see you first.”

She’s been wondering, so she finally asks. “You always say that, why do you always say that?”

Carmilla chews on her lip. “You can be a little blind sometimes.”
Laura crosses her arms. “How so?”

“That,” Carmilla says as she pulls something from Laura’s hair — a leaf or a piece of plastic. Wow, *ew*. “Is for me to know and for you to never find out.”

“I’ll take that as a challenge, then.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags #hsau updates for chapter updates and #carmilla hsau for general updates on the AU.
“Hey, can you guys hold on for a second?”

Carmilla is already by Laura’s side - Mr. Beckett stopped caring about assigned seating altogether - and LaFontaine and Perry are on their way over.

Danny packs her notebook in her bag before coming by her desk, “What’s up?”

Laura offers them all a smile before pulling something from her backpack. She starts passing out tiny cards, “I just wanted to give you invitations for my party this weekend.”

LaFontaine smiles at her, “Laura, we’ve known about your party since forever.”

Laura’s eyes fall immediately on Carmilla, who is intent at staring at the ground and picking at her jeans. Laura bites her lip, “Um, it hasn’t been that long, really-”

“You haven’t shut up about it for over a month.”

“It’s, um,” she leans in closer and looks to Carmilla, “Honestly, I probably just said it to them in passing and, like, this doesn’t mean I didn’t want you there because-”

“Laura, it’s okay.” Carmilla smiles but it barely convinces Laura, “You already explained last week.”

The bell for her next class is going to ring very soon so she doesn’t have the time to reassure her. (She’ll make sure to text her another long explanation after school.)

“Okay so anyway,” she continues to pass out the invitations, “I wanted to give these out personally.”

She hands them out and LaFontaine takes a look at Carmilla’s before glancing back at theirs.

“Hey, how come you didn’t dot the ‘i’ in my name with a heart but you did that for Carmilla’s?”

She glances at Perry before looking back at them, “Well, I obviously didn’t want to give you the wrong impression.”

LaFontaine grins, “Then what kind of impression did you want to give with this?” They tap twice on the heart on Carmilla’s invitation.

“I-” she can feel her cheeks warm, “I wrote all of these at, like, midnight last night. I probably wasn’t thinking.”

(She wrote them all yesterday morning at 10am.)
“Okay, whatever you say-”

“She said she wasn’t thinking so just drop it, ginger twin.” Carmilla turns to Laura, “I’ve gotta head to class. See you later.”

She’s out of the class in a second and Laura looks to LaFontaine with a frown. She’s about to ask them what they meant but Perry interrupts her, “These are honestly very lovely, though. Thank you, Laura.” Perry stares at her with a smile and Laura is grateful - her face is already starting to cool down.

“Yeah,” Danny nods and pockets her invitation, “This was really nice of you. But I’ve gotta head to Spanish, so I’ll see you tomorrow?”

They all nod to her and Laura turns to LaFontaine, “You said you were going to be nicer.”

“That wasn’t even about her! It was-”

“Honey, you’re both going to be late for band so we all better get going.”

Perry ushers them out of the classroom and Laura is left looking confused.

(It was just a heart. It doesn’t even have to mean anything - right?)

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JP (7:09pm): yoooooo

LaF (7:15pm): what’s up man

JP (7:18pm): are we still on to hang out on friday

JP (7:18pm): ?

LaF (7:20pm): yup i’m still good to go

JP (7:21pm): sick

JP (7:29pm): lol my mom just came asking when im hanging out with u again

LaF (7:33pm): haha my parents were asking me the same thing earlier

LaF (7:34pm): they’re so strange wtf

JP (7:36pm): do you think if i told them we hate each other they would cry

LaF (7:37pm): i might actually try that to see if my dad does

JP (7:38pm): i would bet my life-sized lightsaber that it takes 10min for my mom to cry

LaF (7:40pm): i see that and would raise you my microscope signed by bill nye that it takes my dad 5

JP (7:45pm): you’re on. bring it on friday loser

JP (8:28pm): omg my mom actually shed a tear
“Do you always listen to top 40 crap when you drive or is this just a special treat for me?”

Kirsch sighs as he grips the steering wheel, “Dude, it’s my truck - my music choices.”

(He doesn’t mention that there’s only one person who ever gets to dictate the radio besides himself because Carmilla would never let him live it down.)

He hears Carmilla scoff from the back seat and he looks at her in the rearview mirror, “You know, I’m still waiting for a thanks for bringing you to the mall.”

“Whatever, you were already picking up Will. Why would I walk when I could get a free ride, beefcake?”

Will laughs briefly but when Kirsch gives him a look he promptly shuts his mouth. He looks back at Carmilla in the mirror, “Well, still. A thanks would have been nice.”

It isn’t until the first chorus of the next song that she speaks up, “Thanks. I guess.”

Kirsch smiles to himself and decides that’s the best she’s going to give. Will goes on an excited rant about their latest football practice and Kirsch keeps trying to throw him small smiles and encouraging nods when he’s at a stop sign or red light. It still bums him out that he has to sit on the bench and watch while they practice, but he’s not going to risk playing with his hand until it’s fully healed. Besides, it’s only one more week, anyway.

A new song comes on the radio and Carmilla lets out an exaggerated groan. It’s three lines into the verse and Kirsch notices that Will is tapping along to the beat against his thigh. Kirsch grins and reaches forward to raise the volume.

(This earns a glare from Carmilla and a smile from Will. It’s worth it.)

The volume is loud enough to blast through the speakers but Kirsch can swear he can hear Will muttering under his breath. He looks a bit self-conscious and it gives Kirsch an idea.

He waits until the chorus and then sings, “Because you know I’m all about that bass, ‘bout that bass-” he points to Will but he looks back at him with wide eyes, not taking the prompt to finish the line.

“Come on, man! It’s cool.”

He tries again, “…about that bass, ‘bout that bass-”

He points again and this time Will gives out a: “No treble.”

“Oh my fucking God.”

Kirsch laughs at the look on Carmilla’s face and continues to alternate the chorus with Will. They get to the end of it and Kirsch belts out, “I’m all about that bass, ‘bout that bass - hey!”

Will sits up in his seat and cups his hands around his mouth, “I’m bringing booty baaaaaaaaaack-”
Kirsch and Will can’t stop laughing as Carmilla crosses her arms and rests her forehead against the window, “I should have walked.”

(When they get to the mall they agree to split up and Carmilla makes sure to call Will a loser before leaving. Kirsch doesn’t miss the fond look in her eyes, though, and she isn’t fooling him for one second.)

-----

“Alright, dude, so I need to find a really cool gift for Laura.”

They pass by some stores and Will looks up from his phone, “Are you into her or something?”

Kirsch makes a face, “What? No, bro. I mean, we kissed once a long time ago and she had a major crush on me - but at this point she’s more like a sister to me.”


They pass by a clothing store but Kirsch realizes he has no idea what size she is, so he continues walking. “Plus, it’s her 16th so it’s a pretty big deal.”

“Good point. It’s too bad you aren’t rich. You could have just given her a car or something.”

“Uh, yeah - that’s never gonna happen,” he looks ahead and spots Danny walking through the mall. He pulls out his phone but then gets a better idea. He turns to Will, “Give me your phone.”

Will stills and grips his phone, glancing down nervously at it, “Uh, why?”

“Dude, come on - I wanna pull a prank on someone.” Will doesn’t look more at ease with this information and Kirsch rolls his eyes, “Listen, I just need it to text someone, I’m not gonna look through your phone. You can open up a blank text and I’ll enter the phone number and you can watch the screen the entire time. Cool?”

Will blows out a breath and nods. Kirsch smiles, “Thanks bro.”

7375552384 (4:22pm): hey hottie

Danny (4:23pm): Who is this?

7375552384 (4:24pm): u look really great in that red sweater

They look up and see Danny stop in her tracks, glancing around before looking back at her phone.

Danny (4:25pm): Seriously, who is this?

7375552384 (4:25pm): ur secret admirer

Will laughs, “You spelled that wrong. It’s just a-d-m-i-r-e-r.”

“Oh shit, thanks, dude.”

7375552384 (4:26pm): *admirer

Danny (4:28pm): I don’t have time for this.

7375552384 (4:29pm): but u keep responding tho
Danny (4:30pm): How did you get my number?

7375552384 (4:31pm): that's 4 me kno and u 2 find out

He grins as he sees Danny bring a hand to her forehead and press it against her temple.

Danny (4:33pm): Stop texting me.

7375552384 (4:33pm): but then youll never kno who i am

Danny (4:34pm): What a shame.

7375552384 (4:35pm): what r u shopping 4 today?

Danny looks up again and this time does a few extra glances around her. Will can’t stop laughing by his side.

Danny (4:37pm): Okay. This isn’t funny anymore. Who are you?

Kirsch can’t stop the loud laugh that rips through his throat and Danny suddenly looks up from across the way. Her face turns into an immediate glare as she makes a beeline towards them. Will has the decency to straighten up and quickly grab his phone and pocket it before Danny reaches them.

When she’s in front of them she towers over Will, “Alright, I’m assuming that was you?”

Will looks up at her with wide eyes - Kirsch never realized how tiny he is - and glances nervously at Kirsch, “Uh, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Danny turns on Kirsch and pokes hard against his chest, “You are such a bad influence!”

He throws up his hands, “What? You’ve gotta admit it was funny!”

“Nothing is funny about making someone think they have some crazy stalker following them around, you asshole.”

Will laughs at that and Kirsch nudges him with his elbow, “Dude - not cool.” He turns back to Danny, “What are you doing here?”

“I’ve gotta pick up a present for Laura’s birthday.”

“Really? Dude, that’s awesome - I’m here to pick up a present, too.”

Danny raises her eyebrows, “What’s so awesome about that?”

“Well, so we can shop together, obviously.”

Danny laughs and he frowns, “Dude, I’m serious. I really need some help picking something for Laura.”

She grins, “Looks like I’m the better friend, I guess.”

“Not even. I’m such a good friend to Laura. And, uh, I know the kind of stuff she likes,” he glances around and remembers something, “Oh my God, she likes that show right? It’s, uh, it’s British and there’s that guy with the bow tie and the magic hammer and they travel in like a phone booth.”

“Jesus Christ,” Danny sighs and runs a hand through her hair, “It’s Doctor Who, you jackass.”
Kirsch nods enthusiastically, “Yeah, that’s it! I could get her something about that,” his eyes light up, “Oh my God, no. I have a way better idea. It’s on the other side of the mall, though, so let’s go.”

“Um, I never agreed to shop with you guys.”

He rolls his eyes, “Come on, it’s more fun to shop in a group than shopping alone.”

(Technically he wouldn’t be alone since he has Will, so this would really only be something to benefit Danny, but whatever. Maybe he feels sorry for her or something. It’s not like he likes hanging out with her.)

“I beg to differ.”

He grins and holds his elbow out, “Here, we can even escort you around the mall.”

Danny grimaces, “I’m not going to be paraded around like some sort of arm candy.” She steps towards Will and holds her elbow out for him to link, “Let’s go, Will.”

Will laughs and links arms with her, letting her lead him away as she throws her head over her shoulder and sticks her tongue out.

(Yeah, and he’s the bad influence.)

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Carmilla sits on the bench and watches as hundreds of people pass her by in the middle of the mall. There’s something calming about people-watching. So many people - so many unknowns - just floating around her. She finds comfort in the anonymity; there is a soft beauty in not knowing someone and having the power to come up with a story for them.

Take the couple that just walked into the store in front of her. She likes trashy reality television and he enjoys listening to NPR; they both enjoy old film noir movies. They’ve been together for seven years, but he’s actually going to propose to her in two weeks. She’ll say yes before he even finishes the proposal. They’ll write their vows hours before the ceremony on cocktail napkins and decide to just wing it when they actually get up to the altar; they’ve had almost a decade to formulate more than enough reasons to prove why they want to spend another multitude of decades in each others’ arms.

Then there’s the lady who just walked by that has three jobs and loves to do pottery. Her hairdresser is her best friend so she always gets a discount; she never accepts a free ticket because she loves to support her. She has a ten year old son who takes ballet and is obsessed with The Legend of Korra. He looks at her like she’s his very own superhero. They have dinner dates every Monday night at his favourite pizza place and they always order the same thing: half cheese and half meat lovers, without fail. It’s their favourite day of the week.

Or the teenage girl who is sitting at the bench across the way. She belongs to a large group of friends that are inseparable from each other. She recently became captain of the debate team and hopes to be a lawyer some day; she has decent grades, but with a tutor she can make it happen. Her parents make it a point that they eat dinner together every night and never fail to ask about her day. Even though they can be annoying and unreasonable sometimes she knows they would do anything for her. She spends Sundays with them at the local public pool. Her dad lectures her on applying sunscreen and her mom grills her about who she’s dating. They’re some of the best friends she’s ever had.

(The only thing all the people always have in common are having good families. She doesn’t have it in her to imagine more people without love in their homes.)
She sighs and wonders: if people saw her walking by, what would their story for her be?

More importantly, what would Laura think - what kind of made-up story has Laura already created about her, pasted together with the few bits and pieces Carmilla has reluctantly released.

Laura is the first person she’s ever flirted with the idea of talking to about the things going on at home. The closest person to that was Ell, but even with her there was never really the chance. Plus, something about Laura is different - special. (Carmilla smiles just at the thought of her.)

Carmilla worries her lip at the thought of talking to her about this. Laura is so naive, so precious - so good. She doesn’t want to have to taint that part of her. She doesn’t want to be the tarnished spot on her otherwise perfect life. But Laura makes her want to do better, makes her want to be better. Laura almost makes her feel like she deserves things even when she’s surrounded by too much blackness to ever actually see it.

(Laura is her light in the darkness.)

And now she’s getting entirely too philosophical for a Tuesday night in an overcrowded shopping mall. With another sigh, Carmilla reaches into her backpack to pick out a notebook to do some doodling. While rummaging she sees the plastic bag and double checks inside for the fourth time since purchasing it to make sure it’s still there.

She’s been stressing out about Laura’s birthday present since the moment Laura dropped that bomb about the party. After hours of looking online, she found - what she hopes to be - the perfect gift.

The only downside? Spending about two and a half week's worth of paychecks on it. (Laura is worth it. Laura is always worth it).

It’s still tucked away in the bag and Carmilla breathes out a breath of relief. She digs around for a pen and upon finding one starts drawing some caricatures of the cashier at the store she went to - she was so rude and really Carmilla doesn’t need to deal with that.

She’s zoning out while doodling and it isn’t until ten minutes later that Carmilla realizes she started a rough sketch of her and Laura holding hands.

She smiles before tearing it out of her notebook and tucking into her pocket. (Maybe one day she can re-write her own story.)

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Kirsch moves along the queue and approaches the cashier, “Put his combo on my bill.”

Will rushes forward, “No, Kirsch, you don’t have to do that.”

“Bro, do you even have a job?”

Will’s cheeks pink, “Well, no, but my mom gives me an allowance or whatever. I can get it.”

Kirsch slips the cashier a twenty and shakes his head, smiling, “Honestly, dude, it’s not a big deal.”

They wait with their food by the side of the line as Danny pays for hers. When she’s finished they walk to the middle of the food court and find a table to sit at.
“I can’t believe you got Laura that loser gift.”

Danny unwraps her burger and takes a huge bite, chewing a bit before answering, “What the hell is bad about the full series of Veronica Mars on DVD?”

Kirsch shrugs, “I don’t know. It looks like a weird show.”

“This comes from someone who watches Criminal Minds religiously.”

Kirsch sits up straight, “Hey. Criminal Minds is a great show.”

Will looks between the two of them but Danny leans forward, smiling as she throws a few fries in her mouth, “Whatever you say. Tell me: how much did you cry when Hotchner’s ex-wife got killed?”

Kirsch’s jaw drops and he hisses out, “Dude. Why the fuck would you bring that up right now? I’m gonna lose my appetite,” he shakes his head, “Fuck, low blow, man.”

Danny laughs and points a fry at him, “And you know, at least I didn’t buy her a whole fucking candy shop.”

“Hey! That British shoppe had a wicked selection. Laura is going to love it.”

She rolls her eyes, “Just because Laura likes a British show doesn’t mean she’s going to like British sweets, God.”

“Dude, did you see the haul I got, though? I’ve never seen so much chocolate in my life. Tell her, Will.”

He looks to Will and he’s looking between them with a funny expression. Will turns to Danny, “Yeah, it was pretty cool, I guess.”

“How very convincing.”

“Whatever, I got her that Doctor Who notebook, too, since she’s always writing and stuff. So there’s that.”

Danny shrugs and takes a sip of her drink before making a face, “Ugh, they mixed up my drink.”

She looks at Will’s tray, “I can probably get you a free drink, too - since you didn’t get one with your combo - if you want.”


She nods and Kirsch looks at her, “You know I’ll probably finish my fries by the time you’re back if you want to grab me some more, too.”

She smiles wide, “Sorry, I only have two hands.”

He slouches in his seat as he watches her watch away with a pep in her step.

Will turns to him, “So, dude, what’s the deal?”

“With what?”

“You know, you and Danny.”
“You know Danny. Like, I know you’re a freshman but she’s pretty popular.”

Will sighs, “No, of course I know who Danny is.” He takes a few bites of his burger and shifts in his seat, “I mean, like, what’s going on between you two?”

Kirsch pulls a face and laughs, “What? Nothing is going on between us. We, like, hate each other.”

“It doesn’t look like you hate each other.”

“Yeah, well,” Kirsch throws a handful of fries into his mouth, “Okay, so I guess we don’t really hate each other anymore. But, like, we’re barely friends.”

Will shrugs and eats some fries, “You seem to know a lot about each other,” Will almost drops a fry but catches it before it hits his shirt. He wipes his hands and looks back at Kirsch, “Did you guys ever date?”

Kirsch laughs, “Dude, what is this - 21 questions?” He rolls his eyes, “Danny Lawrence would never date me.”

Will smiles wide, “So you’d date her?”

“Alright, losers, we have one Sprite for you,” she places the cup in front of Will, “An actual Coke for me,” she sits down and places her drink on her tray and then throws a small bag of fries on Kirsch’s tray, “And fries for you.”

Kirsch tries not to smile but fails, “Thanks.”

(He can feel Will’s eyes on him but he refuses to look in that direction.)

“So what were you talking about?”

He does look at Will this time and makes sure to give him his best glare.

Will looks at Danny, “We were just talking about some football stuff.”

She smiles, “Were you talking about how my Cowboys completely destroyed your Texans on Sunday?”

Will’s face lights up, “You’re a Cowboys fan, too?”

She nods, “Yup. ‘Cause I have some common sense.”

Kirsch scoffs, “Whatever. And completely destroyed? Please, you won by three.”

She shrugs, “A win is a win - I’ll take it.”

Will and Danny start discussing their favourite Cowboy players while Kirsch just sits lower in his seat.

(Will is just a freshman, so he doesn’t know any better - about Danny or good NFL teams.)

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Perry fixes her hair in the mirror as she feels her phone buzz from her pocket. She pulls it out to check it.
My Person <3 (6:45pm): Hey babe...your chariot awaits ;)

She smiles and rolls her eyes, typing out a quick response.

Care Perr (6:46pm): I’ll be out in a few minutes. P.S. You already have me for life. Please stop with the terrible jokes.

She steps back and checks her outfit one last time. Perry typically prefers jeans and t-shirts, but she decided to test out a new summer dress she bought a few weeks ago. It’s her and LaFontaine’s monthly fancy dinner date and she likes to dress up a little bit. She gives it a final twirl and smiles at her reflection.

(She looks good. And she feels good.)

Her mom is poured over some legal documents and barely waves her hand up in goodbye when Perry tells her she’ll be back by her curfew.

With a sigh she walks to LaFontaine’s car - which she’s started to nickname Death Trap because it’s going to go any day now, especially the way they drive it - and gets inside with minimal struggle.

(The lock decides not to be difficult today.)

“Hey, sorry-”

“Holy fuck, you look fantastic.”

She turns to them and smiles, the look on their face making her smile grow even wider, “Thanks, sweetie.”

“No, I mean, like,” they shake their head, saying out in awe, “Perr. You’re like - really fucking gorgeous right now.”

She giggles and tucks some of her curls behind her ear, feeling a slight blush paint her cheeks, “Stop.”

They look repulsed, “I will never stop talking about how beautiful you are. There will only be two reasons for that: my tongue has been cut out and donated for scientific research or I am dead. And even then - if it’s the first scenario I’ll just make sure to write it down all the time and if it’s the second I’ll just come back as a ghost to haunt you, writing you’re beautiful on fogged windows or some shit.”

“Oh my God,” she holds in a laugh, “Will you just drive?”

LaFontaine gives her a grin before putting the car into drive, “Oh yeah, you bet. Because unfortunately I can’t kiss you right now and that is just unacceptable. FYI: I’m going to break about 50 speed limits on our way out of town to the restaurant to rectify this.”

“LaFontaine,” she puts on her seatbelt and turns to look at them, the turned up smile on their face telling her that they’re joking - at least partially. She hopes.

“I promise we’ll get there in one piece.”

She breathe out a sigh of relief. Once they’re off her street she finally has a chance to give LaFontaine a proper look-over. She smiles to herself as she notices that they bought a new vest. They wore it over their favourite Green Lantern t-shirt, but it definitely dresses the outfit up
tremendously. She even notices a fancy little pocket square peeking out of the front breast pocket.

Her hands brush over it for a second, “These are new.”

They glance down briefly and grip the steering wheel, “Yeah, I, uh, decided to be a bit fancy tonight.”

“You look very dapper. I love it.”

They offer her a bashful smile. She loves when they’re shy.

“Thanks, babe.” They glance down again and roll their eyes, “You would not believe how long it took me to fold this, though. I had to watch, like, three YouTube tutorials to get it right.”

She bites the inside of her cheek to stop from laughing, “I admire your determination.”

“Yeah, you better.”

They end it with a smile and - yeah, this is the kind of thing forevers should feel like.

She glances back at the pocket square, “You hate purple, though.”

They shrug, “It’s your favourite colour, so.”

Her heart does a few somersaults in her chest, “Did anyone ever tell you how amazing you are?”

“Oh yeah, my other four girlfriends make sure to tell me daily. You’ve been slacking lately, I’ve gotta say.”

She slaps their leg, “Shut up. I take back all nice statements I’ve said in the past ten minutes.”

They pull up to a red light and turn to her, “But babe, if you take them back then you don’t get to kiss these lips,” they make the grossest, exaggerated kissing faces at her, “Do you really want to miss out on this?”

She leans back and folds her arms over her chest with a laugh, “I take back what I said in my text. You no longer have me for life.”

That gets a loud laugh out of them and she settles into her seat, savouring the warm feeling she gets whenever she’s around them.

(She’s all bluff. If this is their forever she’s never giving it up.)

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Laura (8:01pm): Hey

Laura (8:01pm): You can still come to my party on Saturday, right?

Carm (8:02pm): Yes........after you asked the first 100 times I thought you would have gotten the hint

Laura (8:03pm): lol I just wanted to make sure

Laura (8:03pm): I realized maybe you might have had a shift at work or something you forgot about, so I just wanted to check
Carm (8:04pm): Even if I had a shift at the store I would have told Shonda to go fuck herself

Laura (8:05pm): lol!!! okay, okay

Laura (8:11pm): Thanks, Carm

Carm (8:12pm): No problem, cupcake

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“Okay, how about that couple?”

Perry subtly glances in the direction of LaFontaine’s nod. “Hmm, I’d say fourth date.”

They make a face, “What? That’s a total first date.”

She smiles back at them, “They’re so comfortable around each other. There’s no way they haven’t dated before.”

“Maybe they’re already friends,” they shrug, “Perr, come on - think of us,” they raise their eyebrow, “What do you think we looked like on our first date?”

Her cheeks warm, “We looked like a couple of fourteen-year-olds making out on my bed.”

LaFontaine has a smug grin before they glance around and their eyes widen, “Oh God, check those ones out.”

Perry follows their eyeline and it falls on an older man and woman. They’re sitting in silence, barely looking up at one another in between bites. There’s a quiet sadness about them, the absence of care and affection radiating around them.

LaFontaine laughs, “Kill me if we ever become like that.”

Perry wants to laugh but she can’t look away. She can immediately see herself as a child, the middle ground between her mom and dad. They weren’t always as silent as this; the younger years were filled with jokes and animated conversation.

(If she squints hard enough, she could even say they were filled with love.)

But as more years were added to her life, less time was spent pretending to care for one another. Perry thinks of the constant fighting now and wracks her brain to figure out when the exact shift was from laughter to silence; concern to apathy; love to hate.

(They had to have been in love at some point, right?)

“Perr?”

She looks up at LaFontaine and brings a hand up to her cheek; she didn’t realize there was wetness there until they brought her back to reality.

She shakes her head, “Sorry, just feeling a bit nostalgic I guess.”

They furrow their brow and lean forward, placing their hand over hers. An instant calm washes over her chest; they drove almost an hour and a half out of town to afford these kinds of luxuries and she’s never been more grateful.
“What’s wrong?”

(What if that’s us? What stops us from getting like that? When will we fall out of love?)

“It’s nothing.”

They frown and a look of recognition passes over them. They squeeze her hand, “We are nothing like them.”

She rolls her eyes, “We don’t even know them.”

“Perr,” LaFontaine gives her a look, “We both know who I’m talking about.”

Her heart is pounding in her chest and she feels her ears burn. She takes a shaky breath before leaning forward, “But how do you know we won’t be?”

“Well, for starters, I’m not going to knock you up and force us into a loveless marriage.”

The words feel like an icy slap against the face, the freeze causing a deep burn in her chest. Their face softens and they offer an apologetic smile, “I mean that in the absolute least offensive way possible.”

She frowns at them and they shake their head, “No, just - hear me out. Your parents love you - there’s no doubt about that. But, let’s face it: we both know they got married because they thought it was the right thing to do. And that’s actually the opposite of us because most people will be telling us it’s the wrong thing to do - which, honestly, fuck them.”

She sighs out a soft laugh and LaFontaine smiles, giving her hand another squeeze before continuing, “Listen. You can’t get rid of me. When I’m pushing forty and my beautifully coiffed hair is starting to get streaked with greys I will proudly sit across from you, ranting about one random topic after the other. You’ll be regretting that I’m not silent.”

She smiles wide, “I love your random topics.”

“Yeah? Even my Titanic theories?”

She groans, “You can’t watch one documentary and call yourself an expert of the event.”

“‘LaFontaine - Deep Sea Advisor’ would beg to differ.”

She bites back a laugh, settling for burying her forehead in her hand.

“I love you - honestly, completely and without any bullshit.”

(Their heart is so big and full of love. It’s one of those moments she feels extra special that they made room in there for her.)

The smile won’t leave her face, “I love you, too.”

“Awesome. Wicked awkward if you didn’t, you know?” Perry laughs and they grin, “So, how about we not make the rest of dinner depressing, and maybe I’ll finally tell you about the culture that I’ve been growing in a beaker under my bed.”

She stills, “Oh God, LaFontaine-”

They wave their hand around, “It’s not that big a deal. I’ll get around to telling you all about it later.”
They launch into a rant about how much of a scam it is that a French restaurant doesn’t even have fries on the menu - *Why call them* French *fries, Perr? Why all the lies?* - and she watches them in silent awe.

(The only thing forcing them together is the call of the steady beat of her heart. She’s completely okay with that.)

-----

**Laura (4:20pm):** Hey!!!

**Laura (4:20pm):** Guess what??

Carmilla smiles to herself. She allows these kinds of luxuries in the privacy of her room where she doesn’t have to deal with questionable looks from the Scooby Gang or – even worse – oblivious ones from Laura.

**Carm (4:22pm):** You’re finally tall enough to ride the big kid rollercoasters?

**Laura (4:23pm):** I’ve been tall enough since last year you know!!

**Laura (4:24pm):** Also you’re only like 1in taller than me

**Laura (4:24pm):** So >:(

She can’t stop the laugh that erupts from her throat, but finds that it quickly turns into a sputter of coughs after reading the next message.

**Laura (4:25pm):** Anyway, *I just got a new bed..wanna come over and help me test it out?? ;)*

Carmilla stares at the phone for a few minutes. Never has she wanted Laura to continue her rapid-fire stream of texts more than in this moment. But now? There’s nothing. Her eyes burn a hole in her phone, the fire concentrating on the words *help me test it out*.

(*Help me test it out. Help me test it out. Help me test it out.*)

Laura wants her to come over. Go into her bedroom. Test out her new bed. Carmilla wracks her head for some other explanation for those words, but her mind keeps wandering to a bed and a lack of clothes and *Laura*.

She doesn’t realize she’s squeezing the phone until the next stream of vibrates startles her.

**Laura (4:27pm):** omg I meant :) not ;) lol!!

**Laura (4:28pm):** But ya do you wanna come over?? It’s more fun jumping on the bed with another person

**Laura (4:30pm):** Plus I’ve been jumping so long that I’m getting dizzy

**Laura (4:31pm):** so it’s basically a safety risk if you don’t come

(If only Laura knew that her being around Carmilla was in itself a safety risk.)

Carmilla shakes her head. Jumping on the bed. She wants to *jump on the bed.*
She stares at the string of texts another few times before tossing her phone on the other end of the bed. This has gone on for far too long. Carmilla doesn’t know how many more times she can be around Laura while putting up with the accidental flirting or the constant touches or the kind of text messages that suggest a not-so-innocent way to test out a bed. It is getting ridiculous. And extremely unfair.

This needs to stop, now. For her own sanity, this has to be it. She already bought a gift, so she’ll just stop by the party tomorrow to drop it off and not stay long - then she can start giving herself some space. She’s going to draw the line and set some boundaries and get over this ridiculous - God, she hates the word - crush of hers.

Carmilla smiles to herself as she leans back against her headboard and crosses her arms.

(Shes finally putting her foot down, once and for all. It feels good.)

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Laura likes a few photos on Facebook when her phone buzzes in her hands. She switches to her messages.

Carm (4:37pm): you’re a dork but I don’t want you to die. I’ll be there in 30

She grins to herself and lets out a tiny squeal, which, no one is around to hear so that’s totally okay.

(This is going to be so much fun.)

-----

They actually end up jumping on the bed for a good hour. Part of Carmilla was hoping that it was one of Laura’s attempts at a joke as a way of just inviting her to hang out but - no, she genuinely wanted to jump on the bed together.

Carmilla tried to point out numerous times that she owns a trampoline, but Laura insisted that after the last injury she didn’t want to risk anything.

Why she thought that jumping on the bed was safer than a trampoline surrounded by a mesh net, Carmilla couldn’t say.

(All she knows is that if Mark was around he would probably have an aneurysm.)

They’re lying side-by-side when Laura blows out a breath, “Okay, I’m bored.”

Carmilla turns her head and raises an eyebrow, “I’m not entertainment enough for you?” She wanted to come up with something more witty, but being this close to Laura means she’s able to find a new freckle on her left cheek and that’s kind of distracting.

(That makes twenty so far.)

“Now you’re making me sound mean.”

Laura is pouting at her and with a huff Carmilla rolls her eyes. She suddenly remembers what she swiped on her way out of the house and scrambles off the bed to grab it out of her backpack. She plops back onto the bed and throws a magazine between them.

“What is this?”
“A 19th Century novella with a lot of lesbian subtext.” Laura gives her a look and Carmilla rolls her eyes, “What does it look like? It’s a magazine,” she grins, “But more importantly: it’s my proof to win our argument.”

Laura sits up and scoffs, “I don’t even know what argument you’re talking about, but I know that I’m right.”

Carmilla shakes her head, maintaining a wide smile as she flips through the magazine and gets to the article in question. “I know you hate magazines, but this is worth it - for me at least.” When she finds the page she tosses it to Laura and points at the title, “See? They finally found out why Angelea was disqualified from All-Stars - and it wasn’t a good reason.”

“Listen, I don’t care what you have to say: rules are there for a reason and just because she was your favourite doesn’t mean she’s exempt from her contractual-”

Carmilla holds up her hand, “I’m going to stop you right there. It says right here,” she taps the page a few times, “that they eliminated her because she had a history working as an escort before filming the show.” Laura frowns a tiny bit and it makes Carmilla’s smile wider, “Yeah, that’s what I thought. Now try and tell me a good reason as to why she deserved to be disqualified from America’s Next Top Model without violating the wonders of your claimed feminism.”

Laura snatches the magazine and holds it close to her face, speed-reading through the article.

Carmilla picks at her nails for a bit, waiting for Laura to launch into a new rant any second now.

“Okay, well-” Laura pauses and her face scrunches up - which is a great sign for Carmilla - before she continues, “We don’t know if this is true or just a rumour.”

Carmilla shrugs and flips onto her stomach, absentmindedly flipping through the pages, “That sounds an awful lot like victim blaming to me.”

She knows she’s won. Even before Laura starts her flustered body buzzing she knows she’s won.

“Whatever, maybe you have a point.”

Carmilla smiles to herself before Laura continues, “Why do you even have this? You don’t seem like the Cosmo kind of girl.”

(She definitely was not reading through it to look up actual skin care regimens because Laura had mentioned one time that she was beautiful and she wanted to keep up that allure.)

“I stole them from Will. He’s a pervert.”

(He suspects he more so bought it for the How to Please Your Man in 5 Easy Steps, but Laura doesn’t really need to know that.)

Laura nods and rolls onto her stomach, making sure to lie down as close to Carmilla as possible without actually being half on top of her.

(Carmilla is never going to survive this.)

She takes a steady breath and gets to the main article of this issue, “Ugh, I don’t get the big deal with these Pretty Little Liars girls.”

Laura shrugs, “I don’t know, Lucy Hale is really pretty. And Shay Mitchell is, like, super hot.”
Carmilla tries not to rip the page she’s holding, “You know, just because I’m gay doesn’t mean we have to talk about hot girls.”

“I don’t mind talking about girls with you if you want. A lot of my closest friends are attracted to girls - it’s not that far-fetched for me.”

(Accidental flirting. Constant touching. Sexual innuendo text messages. And now: talking about hot girls.

This is by far the absolute worst straight girl that Carmilla has ever fallen for.)

Laura’s eyes light up. “We could do like a rating thing! Like, we look at a girl and rate her from 1-10 - not that I want to objectify them based purely on appearances alone - but, you know, just for fun. Plus, I’ve always wanted to know if you have a type.”

(This cannot actually be happening. She’s had enough of this. There is no way she is going to subject herself to this.)

“Sure. Why not.”

Laura squeals briefly and she shakes back and forth before pressing herself into Carmilla’s side for a moment, “Yay! Okay, okay - let’s start. So, Lucy Hale?”

“Five.”

Laura turns to her, “What? She’s at least a seven.”

Carmilla shrugs and turns the page, “Not in my books. She’s definitely not my type.”

Laura frowns but doesn’t press further, which Carmilla is grateful for. It would make things kind of awkward to explain that her type is lying right beside her.

They go through some more girls and Carmilla finds that Laura almost always rates them very high; Carmilla tries to rate them as low as reasonably believable because it gets more of a rise out of Laura. She ends up launching into rants about all of their best qualities, starting with the best features about their looks and ending with something like and she should get an eight because she looks like she has a really nice personality.

The first low number Laura gives - a six, which isn’t bad, but pales in comparison to the typical nines she’s been giving - makes Carmilla pay a bit more attention. She studies the photo and immediately notices that the girl’s smile reminds her of Laura’s. It causes the corners of her lips to tug up slightly.

“I’d give her a nine.”

Laura turns her head and - yeah, lying side-by-side with someone who has no concept of personal space means that Carmilla is in danger of being distracted by those freckles again. Laura tilts her head, “Really? A nine?”

Carmilla looks at Laura’s lips for a fraction of a second. Yeah, she’s confident in her answer, “Mhm. A definite nine.”

Laura glances down and suddenly has the shyest smile on her face, “Yeah, maybe you’re right.”

(She finds another freckle near the bridge of her nose. Twenty-one.)

She flips a few more pages when Laura’s hand reaches forward and stills her, “Wait, wait - oh my
God, Emma Watson! I love her so much. She’s a *definite* ten.”

Carmilla turns back to the page and then raises her eyebrow at Laura. It’s the first ten she gave so far, so Carmilla is curious, “Hermione, huh? Didn’t think you had a thing for wizards.”

Laura rolls her eyes, “It’s not a Hermione thing, you goof. When I think of her it’s like, you know, as her as a real person.”

Carmilla grins. She can have a bit of fun with this, “When you think of her? And do you do that often, cupcake?”

“Well, yeah,” Laura shrugs, “She’s one of my go-to’s, you know?”

“Go-to’s?”

“Yeah, like, when I’m trying to-” she shifts, and tucks some hair behind her ear, “You know, like during my private time.”

The grin falls completely from Carmilla’s face. She can’t possibly be talking about what she thinks she’s talking about.

“Okay, let me just get something straight-”- *even though there is nothing straight about this*- “When you say *private time*, what do you mean exactly?”

Laura huffs and suddenly sits up, looking determined and slightly frustrated, “You *know* what I’m talking about. And, you know, I’m very sick of the double standard that comes with talking about masturbation. Girls are just - we’re taught to be ashamed of talking about it when in reality it is a completely healthy thing for *anyone* to do. And if I have to listen to guys talk about touching their - their *things* - then I can talk to my best friend about my *private time*.”

“Private time that apparently includes *Emma Watson*.”

(This can’t be a real conversation happening right now.)

“Well, yeah. I mean, she’s really inspirational, so.”

“Oh? I wasn’t aware that was a requirement for the people you get off to.”

Laura furrows her brows, “Isn’t it for everyone?”

Carmilla has made a lot of mistakes in her life, but she’s not sure if choosing to come to Laura’s has either been the best or worst decision of her life. She sits up fully and faces Laura, “Maybe I’m old-fashioned, cupcake, but when I touch myself I think about people I actually *want* to fuck.”

Laura immediately goes red in the face and looks like she’s biting back about a million questions. (It settles a strong sense of satisfaction in Carmilla’s chest.)

Laura shakes her head, “It’s not - no, you’re misunderstanding. She’s just - okay, so she did this speech for HeForShe in the summer - you’ve heard of it right?” Carmilla shakes her head, “It basically was this really great speech about breaking the stigma surrounding feminism and inviting men to step up in our movement towards equality. It obviously had its flaws in some of the language and points made, but like, overall it was just super inspiring. And I mean, I just really respect that? And I’m just really passionate about it and sometimes passion is similar to feeling - you know - so, yeah.”
Carmilla doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry. She tries to keep a straight face, “Alright, that’s... understandable. But there’s gotta be people other than Emma, right?”

Laura looks relieved and slightly less embarrassed. She nods enthusiastically and shifts closer, “Oh yeah, of course! Well, obviously, there’s Beyoncé - because, duh. And, let’s see,” her tongue darts out the side of her mouth as she looks up, “Oh! Okay, so Kristen Stewart, Nicki Minaj, Lupita Nyong’o, Natalie Dormer, Laverne Cox. Um... Tatiana Maslany! She does amazing things for women in television and also such an advocate for LGBT representation - which reminds me, you really have to start watching Orphan Black with me, I haven’t forgotten.” Carmilla rolls her eyes but Laura ignores it, “Uh, Taylor Swift! She’s had a complete turn around and that’s just like, really refreshing to see and she’s a lot more vocal in her interviews and stuff. And of course, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie because - wow, you’ve gotta see this TED talk she did. It’s actually where Beyoncé sampled the spoken words in ***Flawless. And God - don’t even get me started on that song.”

She stares at Laura blankly. She really only asked half-seriously, but the part of her that was curious at least expected some men to be on the list. Carmilla isn’t the kind of person who believes in hope - at this point she doesn’t have much reason to, honestly. But her seemingly-straight crush talking in enthusiastic detail about women that she thinks of while touching herself? It’s almost the kind of thing to give her just an ounce of it.

“That’s quite the roster you have there.”

Laura’s face falls and she seems to shrink inside herself, “You’re mocking me.”

Carmilla offers her a smile, “I’m not - honestly. It’s just,”- How do I even start this conversation? -“ Have you ever considered that it’s a little strange that your list is, well, entirely women?”

Laura makes a face, “Not really. I mean, I kind of thought this was something that everyone did.” She sits up and straightens, “Plus, I did look this up once - cause, okay you’re right, it’s kind of weird - and on a Yahoo! Answers thread I saw that the things you fantasize about don’t dictate your sexuality. Like, a lot of girls get turned on by two gay men but it’s not like they’re a gay man, right? So, this is obviously the same thing.”

This is probably the complete opposite of the same thing. “Good point.”

“And like,” Laura fiddles with her fingers, “They’re all such amazing women and I just love supporting women because we should really be building each other up instead of tearing each other down.”

Carmilla isn’t sure what brand of feminism includes getting off to women as a form of building them up, but whatever. She knows this isn’t really a conversation that is going to go anywhere anyway. She tries not to sigh externally, but she knows that there’s no point in holding onto that hope. She doesn’t even deserve it, really. Even if Laura did like girls it’s not like Carmilla would be good enough for her.

Carmilla offers an agreeing nod and smile as they continue to look through some more celebrity photos, “Whatever you say, sweetheart.”

At one point a silence falls over them while flipping through pages and Carmilla can’t help the laugh that bursts out of her throat. Laura turns and frowns at her, “What?”

“It’s-” she lets out another laugh and holds her sides, “I’m not making fun of you - I swear - but, I can’t believe that you get off to an extensive list of inspiring feminist role models.”
Laura does that scrunchy face again and - yeah, she’s a goner.

“You said you weren’t going to mock me!”

“I’m not. It’s just - I’m never going to be able to watch Harry Potter the same ever again.”

“Then you’ll be missing out. I really love those movies.”

She’s grinning in a way that tells Carmilla she’s trying to poke fun of herself and after rolling her eyes Carmilla can’t stop herself from leaning forward and giving her a brief kiss on the cheek.

She pulls back suddenly and shakes her head, “Sorry, that was - you were just being really funny and - I’ve wanted to kiss you for real for over a month - I couldn’t resist, cutie.”

“That’s okay. I don’t mind.” Laura smiles in a way that let’s her know that she genuinely doesn’t mind at all. Carmilla’s heart flips a few times.

“So - Emma Watson, really?”

Laura rolls her eyes but gives her a playful shove - which still hurts like a bitch, but it’s worth it.

“Yes,” Laura flips another page, “For the record, you’re totally prettier than Emma, anyway. At least in my opinion.”

Carmilla can only nod her head and hope that her bowed head allows her hair to hide the large smile on her face, “Noted.”

(Maybe hope isn’t completely out of the cards for her after all.)

-----

“Alright, dude, what about that girl?”

LaFontaine nods their head in the direction of one of the ramps where a girl is doing a few ollies on her skateboard.

JP leans back and dangles his feet over the quarter pipe, “Hmm. She’s pretty cute. What do you think?”

They shrug, “I don’t know. I was looking for you, not me.”

He groans, “Come on, LaF! We’ve been here for forty-five minutes and all we’ve done is look at hot guys and girls for me, but none for you. When you suggested we scope out hot people at the skatepark I figured you would participate, too.”

They raise their eyebrows, “You know I’m basically married, right?”

He rolls his eyes, “I’m not saying cheat on your girlfriend - that’s gross. But, like, there’s no harm in looking.”

LaFontaine looks at the girl and then immediately thinks of Perry, letting out a contented sigh, “I wish I could like, pop my eyes out and transplant them into your sockets so you could see the world the way I do. Because if you did? You wouldn’t be able to see anyone else in focus the way I see Perry.”

JP mimes throwing up and LaFontaine kicks him in the shin, “Woah! That actually hurt.”
“Good.” They smile at him, “Besides, when I made this suggestion I kind of meant it more for you. I could be like, your wing person or something.”

His face falls, “Um, I thought that you kind of understood what I’m going through-”

“No, no,” they shake their head, “I don’t mean to find someone to date. Just like, you know, if you’re interested in hooking up with someone.”

JP laughs, “You make me sound like an asshole.”

They shrug and smile, “Not really. It’s just the way you are. Nothing wrong with that. And if you aren’t interested in hooking up then there’s still no harm in looking, right?”

JP almost pushes them off the pipe and they promptly flip him off. When they’ve gotten their bearings they let out a sigh, “Alright, alright, so... I guess that girl is - kind of cute?”

“Oh my God, you can’t even appreciate other people properly because of Perry. You’re disgusting.”

They smile wide, “Thanks. I take that as a compliment.”

“I want you to find someone who looks attractive that looks in no way like Perry.”

They huff, “Fine,” they look around the park when they see a girl who is pretty decent looking and doesn’t match Perry’s look in the slightest. They point, “Alright, her. She’s cute. Doesn’t look like Perry at all. Her hair is way too straight.”

JP nods, “Nice pick. She’s-”

“Except - you know there was this one day about three weeks ago - I think it was a Thursday because I had a bio club meeting - that Perry showed up to school with pin-straight hair. She just decided to borrow her mom’s straightener and give it a try. Let me tell you, it was a fucking wild day. She was stunning,” they lean back on their elbows and sigh, “It’s too bad it takes her too long in the morning because she was so gorgeous. I mean, it’s Perry, so she’s always gorgeous but-”

“Holy shit. You’re actually disgusting,” JP is looking at them with a blank look and slightly shaking his head, “When I said it before I was joking but you are actually disgusting.”

“You say disgusting, I say the luckiest person in the world.”

JP runs a hand down his face and they laugh before grabbing their phone out of their pocket to check the time, “Listen, I can only stay for another hour or so because I have way too much homework to catch up with. I’m kind of getting buried to be honest.”

JP makes a face and nods, “I feel you. My school has been piling stuff up so much in the last week - it’s only the second week of October! Like, fuck,” he blows out a breath and scratches at his neck, “Good thing I have some prescribed pick-me-ups to help me get through it, if you know what I mean.”

“Ah, gotcha.”

He picks at his shoelaces before glancing up at LaFontaine, “You’re not like, against that or anything, right?”

“No, no - it’s not really my place to judge.”

(It honestly isn’t.)
“Nice,” he grins at them, “Does that mean you’re into it then?”

They laugh, “No, it’s not really for me.”

(It’s really not.)

JP nods, “That’s cool, no worries.” He claps his hands, “Alright, since scoping for hot people is a complete fail since I don’t know what the hell I want and you’ve already found your fucking soulmate, wanna go pick up some food and game a bit at my place?”

“Can we grab chips on the way?”

He rolls his eyes, “I already have two bags left over from the last time you were there. No one eats them.”

“Perfect.”

(They may have found their soulmate, but they’re glad they’re still making really great friends, too.)

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“Are you almost done with your homework?”

She smiles into her notebook. Laura is usually the one to nag about doing things when they hang out, so it’s nice to have Carmilla do it sometimes.

“I already told you that I’ve gotta finish this stuff up tonight since I’ll be too busy this weekend with my party to do any of it.”

Carmilla groans and throws her head back against the pillow, the book she was reading falling to her chest, “You’re being a terrible host.”

“You’re free to leave if you’d like.”

(Please don’t leave.)

Carmilla sits up, grinning, “And leave you all alone with your dangerous new bed where you could jump yourself to death? How could I possibly live with myself if anything happened to you?”

She smiles again - which isn’t that rare because Carmilla brings it out of her - and shakes her head.

“You know, I’m not entirely sure I believe you’re doing homework.” Laura looks over at her before she continues, “How do I know you’re not there writing your fanfiction or something?”

Laura rolls her eyes, “I’m not writing fanfiction - you can come check for yourself if you’d like.”

Carmilla throws her book to the other end of the bed, “You know what I don’t get? Your Febreze couple-”

“Faberry.”

“Whatever - they aren’t even together in the show.”

She puts her pen down and turns in her chair. She gets up and walks over to the bed, taking a seat beside Carmilla. This requires her full attention, “Well, no - not technically. But, like the stuff is all laid out there.” She pauses, “Wait - how do you even know that?” Carmilla stills and locks her jaw.
Laura starts to slowly grin, “Oh my God, have you been watching *Glee*?”

“What? No. That’s ridiculous.”

Laura looks at her pointedly and Carmilla shrugs, “So I watched a few episodes. It was on in the background while Will was watching Netflix in my room. He’s a total loser.”

(Laura knows for a fact that she couldn’t have deduced that Rachel and Quinn weren’t together from only *a few episodes*. This is the best news of her life.)

“Right. I’m sure.”

“Anyway, I don’t get why you’re so obsessed with them.”

Laura smiles and tilts her head, “They kind of remind me of you and I, actually.”

“Excuse me?”

“No, honestly, they do.”

She smiles and raises her eyebrows, “Cupcake, aren’t these the two characters that you keep insisting are desperately in love?”

Laura freezes, “Uh, well *yes*, but - you know what I mean.”

“No, I really don’t. Please enlighten me.”

Laura scowls, “What I *mean* is that - well, Rachel really wanted to be Quinn’s friend at first, and Quinn was just a total bitch to her for a while - don’t give me that face, I know you’re great now, but come on. But, yeah, they just start off as enemies but they end up being really great friends in the end.”

Carmilla grins and leans closer, “Yeah, friends that you write about fucking each other.”

Her face immediately heats up, “What? I don’t,” she lets out a nervous laugh and shakes her head, “I don’t write about them like that. I don’t write them at all.”

“Oh yeah?” Carmilla pulls out her phone and scrolls through it.

“What are you doing?”

She doesn’t answer until she gives a small humming noise of approval. She clears her throat dramatically, before reading in a high-pitched voice, “*Rachel stared at Quinn like she was the prettiest girl in the whole wide world. She knows that she only threw the slushie because of the pressure she felt by the other Cheerios. She knows where her true heart lies.*”

Laura’s face is on *fire*, “Where did you find that?”

Carmilla looks like she’s going to burst out laughing at any minute, “You left it open on your laptop one night. I’ve had it bookmarked on my phone ever since.”

“That’s not-” Laura scrunches her face and shakes her head, pointing at her, “You can’t do that!”

“What? I can’t read something you publically posted on the internet?” She looks back at her phone and scrolls a bit before actually laughing this time, “Oh my God, this is the best line: *In the heat of the moment Rachel just went for it. She closed her eyes and sighed as their tongues battled for*
dominance.” Carmilla looks up at her with comical eyes, “How violent do you think lesbian sex is?”

Laura makes a swipe for Carmilla’s phone but she’s too quick and raises her hand up, “Give that to me!”

“No way, cutie. This is gold.”

“Carmilla,” she reaches again but still isn’t fast enough. She ends up finally putting her whole hand around Carmilla’s fist and bringing it down between them. Laura’s so close to her that she can smell her perfume.

(He smells like summertime and orchids and beauty.)

She licks her lips and Laura’s stomach does a flip flop at the sight. “Um-”

“Yes?”

They aren’t even trying to gain possession of the phone anymore, Laura too distracted by the proximity of their faces. Her bruise isn’t as pronounced as last week, which is a good sign. But her skin is still frustratingly flawless, and she should really remind her to actually email that skin routine she uses.

“Laura?”

Laura snaps out of it, pulling back and shaking her head, “Yeah, sorry. Um-” she tries to look as intimidating as possible, “Just don’t share that link with anyone ever, okay?”

Carmilla’s face softens, “Of course. I wouldn’t ever do that.”

Laura nods, “Okay, thanks.” They’re staring at each other again and Laura wonders if Carmilla is going to give her another kiss on the cheek. It felt nice before so she wouldn’t really be opposed. She kind of wonders how she can get her to do it again.

But Carmilla is already pulling back to lay out on the bed again, pocketing her phone and reaching for her book, “Just finish your homework so we can actually do something before I have to head home.”

Laura groans and reluctantly gets up, “Fine.” She walks to her bed and slumps into her seat. When she picks up her pen she doodles a bit in the corner, smiling as she thinks about summertime and orchids.

(He’s so happy to have found a friend like this. He’s never been happier.)

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Kirsch (10:30pm): *what time r u going 2 laura’s party 2moro*

Kirsch (10:32pm): ?

danny L (10:37pm): *Probably an hour before it actually starts to see if she needs any help getting stuff ready.*

Kirsch (10:39pm): *that’s cool*

danny L (10:51pm): *What time are you going?*
Kirsch (10:52pm): 1hr and 1 min before it starts
Kirsch (10:52pm): so that i look like the better friend
Kirsch (10:52pm): :)
danny L (10:53pm): You’re a dick.
Kirsch (10:54pm): u wish u could SEE my dick
danny L (10:57pm): I’m sorry, I had to go change. I had just thrown up all over my shirt at the thought of that.
Kirsch (10:57pm): haha i got u 2 think of me naked
danny L (10:57pm): You’re so immature, Jesus Christ. P.S. You had a small dick. I wasn’t surprised.
Kirsch (10:58pm): lol i was joking relax
Kirsch (10:58pm): r u bringing a lot of hotties to the party?
danny L (10:59pm): You know we have names, right? You don’t have to objectify us all the time based off of what we look like.
Kirsch (11:00pm): sorry, my bad..so r u bringing a lot of summer society chicks w/ u
danny L (11:00pm): None that would want to hook up with you.
Kirsch(11:01pm): everyone wants 2 hook up w/ me
danny L (11:02pm): Your level of self-perception is very alarming.
Kirsch (11:02pm): it’s true
Kirsch (11:03pm): did u wrap ur dumb gift
danny L (11:04pm): 1. It’s a great gift. 2. Of course I did. Did you manage you wrap yours without eating it all?
Kirsch (11:06pm): ya duh..she’s gonna love it
Kirsch (11:07pm): and like..i only ate a tiny bit of it
Kirsch (11:08pm): theres so much good candy stuff they dont make here
danny L (11:09pm): I’m not surprised at ALL lol
Kirsch (11:11pm): 11:11..make a wish
danny L (11:11pm): You’re unbelievable.
Kirsch (11:11pm): did you wish?
danny L (11:12pm): Yeah. Did you?

Kirsch (11:12pm): ya. dont tell anyone tho or else it wont come true

danny L (11:13pm): Okay, whatever you say.

Kirsch (11:14pm): so dont tell people ur wishing 2 see me naked

danny L (11:14pm): Is it really true that if I tell people the wish won’t come true?

Kirsch (11:15pm): yup

Kirsch (11:18pm): Good. I just told 5 people that I wished to see you naked.

Kirsch (11:19pm): lol ur loss hottie

Kirsch (11:20pm): sry i mean danny

danny L (11:21pm): Lol I’m going to bed. Goodnight Kirsch

Kirsch (11:22pm): night..sweet dreams

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The nerves settling at the bottom of her stomach haven’t stopped churning for the past hour. Tomorrow is Laura’s party - which is already making her nervous - but on top of that it’s a pool party. There are a lot of unknowns about tomorrow that is doing nothing for her climbing anxiety.

She throws away her last shred of dignity and hits the call button of the contact she’s had on her screen for the past fifteen minutes.

It only takes one ring.

“Carm? Are you okay?”

She smiles, “Yeah, I’m okay.”

“Oh, thank God,” there’s a shuffle in the background. She's probably in bed, “I thought I was the one in this friendship to make clingy calls only hours after hanging out.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “Thought I would switch it up for a change.”

“Hmm,” a pause, “It’s a little past midnight - are you sure you’re okay?”

Carmilla hums and settles into her pillow, “Yeah. I, uh, I couldn’t sleep.”

“Oh. Okay.”

There’s a comfortable silence for a few moments before Carmilla speaks up, “You know, I haven’t watched this week’s episode of Faking It yet - so, if you’re awake enough and don’t mind re-watching it-”

“I haven’t watched it yet. I was waiting for you.”

She closes her eyes and smiles wide. Her heart is racing for reasons entirely unrelated to anxiety now. “Cool. Let me know when you get a link, cupcake.”
She laughs softly into the phone as she hears Laura trip over a few things in her room as she looks for her laptop.

(She’s suddenly not so nervous about tomorrow. Not when she knows she’ll get to see Laura.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.

Fool's Gold updates every Tuesday & Thursday, 5-6PM EST
Stay for the Night

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 12, or the one where Laura's birthday party probably could have gone a little better than it did.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Abuse Mention & Misgendering (Implied)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It’s 4:02pm on a Saturday and Laura can’t remember the last time she was quite this stressed about her birthday.

The party has only officially started for two minutes but most of the people in Laura’s backyard have been here for hours — thanks to Danny and Kirsch’s impressive punctuality. And already there’s been two bickering matches between them. One over whose watch runs faster and one over hot dogs versus hamburgers: which make the ideal party food? Once they settled those arguments, Laura made them promise not to argue for the rest of the night; a promise she’s almost 100% certain they won’t keep.

Her Dad is stress baking because Kirsch invited at least half of the football team over — including at least ten guys that Laura has never seen before in her life. Football players really do start to blend together and Carmilla has already called six of them by the exact same name. She’s pretty sure it’s been on purpose, because the more she does it, the more Laura struggles not to laugh. Will showed up too, much to Carmilla’s surprise, but Kirsch had declared him as his plus-one.

(As if he and Danny hadn’t both invited a combined army of Zetas and Summer Society members.)

LaFontaine is sulking on an armchair in the living room, or they were before Laura and Carmilla had gone upstairs. Which is perhaps unsurprising since Perry had joined her Dad in the kitchen the moment she walked through the door. Kirsch, Danny, and more jocks than Laura has ever wanted in her house have already invaded the pool. From her bedroom she hears the intro of Taylor Swift’s Shake it Off coming from the backyard, followed by the unanimous groan from the football team when somebody changes the station.

Laura is still staring at the contents of her closet, but she can hear the bed creak when Carmilla shifts to look at her.

“You know you’re not being a very good host if you just hide out in your bedroom all day.”

“I’m not... hiding.” Laura plucks a random one piece bathing suit from a hanger — it’s blue, she likes that color — and a towel. “I’m just changing.”

“I can see that.”
“Besides, I doubt they even noticed we’ve been gone. The boys probably think we’re just taking forever to fix our hair or whatever.” She touches the messy bun her hair is in while she glances at the mirror over her dresser. It’s a little looser than when Carmilla had done it for her earlier, but not noticeably so. She likes the way her hair looks when it’s put up. She looks older. Sixteen, even though her birthday isn’t until tomorrow.

“They’re certainly having plenty of fun without us.” Carmilla plucks a book off of Laura’s nightstand and starts to leaf through it.

“Hey, aren’t you going to change?”

“I thought you liked me just the way I am.”

It takes her a second to realize it’s a joke. “Ha. No, I meant into like, a bikini or something.”

Carmilla doesn’t look up from her book. “I forgot mine at home.”

“I told you it was a pool party like a billion times.” She files through a drawer in her dresser, the offer of borrowing one of her own suits on the tip of her tongue until she realizes Carmilla probably wouldn’t fit hers. Laura might be an A cup, but Carmilla is definitely not.

She shrugs. “Guess you should have said so a billion and one times.”

Carmilla doesn’t seem bothered by not being able to join them, so Laura doesn’t let herself worry about the jealous pang in her chest at the thought of the entire football team gawking at Carmilla in just a bikini. She’s not usually possessive like that, but maybe it’s just a best friend thing. “You’re kind of a weirdo, you know?” Laura tosses her towel at Carmilla.

“There are worse things to be.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll be back.” She slips into the bathroom attached to her room and changes quickly. As an afterthought, she picks up her oversized t-shirt from the laundry hamper and puts that on too so that she doesn’t have to walk through her house in a bathing suit while Carmilla wears her usual black jeans and tight shirts. She does have a new shirt on today, some band shirt that Laura doesn’t recognize, with the sleeves rolled up. It looks nice on her.

When she shuts the bathroom door behind her again, Carmilla is still on the bed reading.

“You gonna stay in here all night?”

“And miss seeing you in a swimsuit? Not a chance.” She tosses the book aside and glides off the bed in that graceful way that only Carmilla can manage. Laura laughs, but it’s half-hearted.

(Her stomach is turning at the idea, for whatever reason.)

“Cool.”

—

The music gets significantly louder once they slip through the sliding glass door. Her Dad is honestly a saint for putting up with this and Laura starts to prepare her apology — starting with ‘I promise to never write the more the merrier on a party invitation ever again’.

Danny and Kirsch are, unsurprisingly, arguing over a cooler. But there’s a hint of a smile on Danny’s face like she’s enjoying the conversation, so Laura doesn't worry too much about it getting
Carmilla leaves her side and drops herself into one of the plastic lounge chairs on the other side of the pool deck. She pretends to read something on her phone but Laura knows it’s an act because she has her sunglasses on, and she’s starting to be able to tell where Carmilla looks when she’s hiding behind those glasses.

(Usually at Laura, but she also enjoys looking at strangers, for whatever reason.)

She thinks Carmilla has to be sweating in this heat. Black clothes and mid-October Texas weather are like, the worst combination, but if she’s heating up, it doesn’t show. As usual, she’s just kind of effortlessly pretty.

Laura twists the hem of her shirt in her grip before she pulls it over her head and drops it next to a pile of Perry and LaFontaine’s things. She skips the sunscreen; her skin doesn’t burn quickly and she might even get a nice tan out of this.

Kirsch decides in that moment to splash half the water out of her pool in one clumsy cannonball jump that earns him a few cheers from the Zetas and even from a handful of Summer Society girls. Laura slips into the water with barely a ripple and immediately feels a little shielded, a little more comfortable. She had always been shy, even as a kid, and now that Carmilla is taking her sunglasses off to meet her eyes, she can feel the nervous knot in her stomach. It’s hard to ignore when her best friends have always been this pretty and she’s always been just Laura.

Carmilla says something but it’s drowned out by the sounds of the stereo and the crowd, so Laura swims over towards her.

(And there’s like, a billion pool toys that don’t even belong to her in the way, so clearly everyone's made themselves at home here.)

She props her arms up on the pool deck and leans forward to get a little closer to Carmilla’s chair. “Sorry, did you say something?”

“I said you could probably drive away half this crowd if you put on One Direction.” She grins and Laura suspects this is a joke she’s been waiting to make for a while.

Her chin drops against her arms and she giggles. “You think you’re so funny.”

“I know I am.”

(Laura knows it too, but still.)

—

From the moment Perry walks in the door with LaFontaine, everything seems to happen all at once. Laura’s father asks her for help with Laura’s cake because as lovely as he is as a father, that man is a disaster in the kitchen. By the time she returns to the living room, at least fifteen of Danny and Kirsch’s friends have made an appearance and LaFontaine sits pouting in a corner of the living room.

She understands why, but Perry can’t help but feel like it’s her fault for not telling them that this was a possibility.

LaFontaine joins her by the pool when the party moves to the backyard and Laura’s father takes a break from cooking to take a phone call. They’re wearing that rashguard that she bought them over the summer — the black one with green accents, and she doesn’t even notice they’re in the backyard
until Perry feels a pair of hands rubbing sunscreen on her back.

"There you are."

They don’t say a word, shaking the bottle of sunscreen and spraying down the length of Perry’s arms. She turns. “Hey. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, no, I’m fine.” They wipe the sunscreen from their hands on the back of their neck. “I’m sorry, I’m totally ruining this party for you, aren’t I?”

Nobody is really paying attention to them, so she hooks her index finger around LaFontaine’s. “It’s not you. I get it.” She glances at the group of boys standing around the diving board and traces ‘L+P’ on the back of LaFontaine’s hand. It does nothing to cheer them up and they just shake their head instead.

“Perr, I’m so sick of this. Honestly.”

“I know, sweetie. Trust me, I understand.” She fixes her ponytail, allowing herself to look at the Summer Society girls hovering nearby.

“I just want to go to a party with my girlfriend,” their voice drops to a whisper, “And I want to hold your hand and flirt with you and kiss you in public and not have to ask people for their approval.”

Kirsch interrupts them before they can say anything more. “Burgers?” He holds out a plate of messily assembled cheeseburgers.

“No, thank you, Kirsch.” Perry says quickly.

“We’re good, thanks.”

“Alright, suit yourself.” He moves down the line of people standing around the pool, almost tripping over the garden hose that somebody had left out.

Perry looks back at LaFontaine. Their hair is a complete mess, like they’ve been running their hands through it all day. She sighs and attempts to tame it as much as she can without a brush.

“It’s Laura’s birthday.”

They nod. “You’re right.”

“But the party should only last a few more hours, and then we can go back to my house if you want.” She has nothing else to do with her hands, so Perry just puts them on her hips. “We’ll watch House Hunters and eat too much ice cream. We’ll have our own party,” she eyes the impromptu game of water polo happening in the deep end of the pool. “One without…”

“Half our student population?” They offer.

“Exactly.”

“That sounds nice.”

—

The plastic chair she had found by the pool isn’t comfortable at all, so after thirty minutes or so, Carmilla opts to just sit cross legged on the pool deck in front of where Laura combines treading water and clinging to the wall. She’s obviously not tall enough to touch the bottom of the pool and
keep her head above water, but she acts like she can, and maybe that’s one of the reasons they have so much in common.

“What did your Dad get you for your birthday?”

She imagines he’s the type to completely spoil Laura on her birthday. If she could, Carmilla would too.

“Actually, the bed was my big gift. Sort of. I’ve had that twin-size one since forever. He also got me a TV but it only has like nineteen channels and it’s just an old one from our guest bedroom, so it’s less of an expensive thing and more of a trust gift. Which is nice, ‘cause he’s always been pretty strict about the no TV or video games in my room thing.” She thinks for a moment. “Oh! And he said he was gonna give me my last gift tomorrow since today isn’t actually my birthday. But he also has a bunch of stuff wrapped in the basement that he’s probably gonna give me when we do the present exchange.”

“Present exchange?” Carmilla shifts a little – there’s nothing remotely comfortable about sitting on essentially a cement slab. In tight jeans, no less. And she’s still sore.

“Yeah, most people brought presents, so I’m gonna open them when we have cake.” She crosses an arm in front of her chest to rub her shoulder. “It’s totally fine if you didn’t bring anything, by the way, I doubt any of those Zeta guys that Kirsch brought even know it’s my birthday.”

“I brought something.”

Laura beams. “Oh. Well… thanks.”

Something occurs to her and Carmilla licks her lips. “You said he’s giving you something else tomorrow. Any idea what that is?”

“I’m pretty sure it’s a laptop, but I don’t want to get my hopes up.”

Carmilla breathes a sigh of relief and nods.

“I mean, I already have a laptop, but it heats up after you use it for twenty minutes and I’ve mentioned that at least a thousand times this month so I’m pretty sure he got the hint.”

It’s true – her computer is so old it would make panicked whirring noises and start to heat up almost immediately. They had even melted a cookie on the mouse pad once.

“What did you get for your sixteenth birthday?”

It takes her a minute to think back – it was in her freshman year, or more accurately the year she had repeated 9th grade. Will was still in middle school, but he had saved up enough allowance to buy her a cheap iPod, the only gift she really remembered from that year. Her birthday is six days before Christmas and almost all her gifts start to blend together after a while. She’s sure her mother bought her more expensive jewelry that year. She knows she must have gotten clothes – she always does.

“I got a… leather jacket I think. And an iPod.”

“You have a leather jacket?”

“Mmhm.” Somewhere in her closet, she’s sure. The one she bought herself last winter. But she rarely gets a chance to wear it in this weather, and it’s really more suited for cold nights wandering around a city she wishes was foreign to her, a city she knows all too well now.
“That’s cool. You should wear it sometime.”

She’s about to make a comment about how it would look better on Laura — it would — when she sees two of the guys that she knows belongs to the crowd Laura never invited. They’re coming at her at a dead run, and it’s the only warning she gets before they’re dumping out the contents of a bulky red cooler onto her. It’s cold water mixed with ice — a lot of ice. Too much ice. Ice down the back of her shirt, ice in her lap, ice water pouring through her hair. Everything is cold, everything is wet, and everyone is howling. She can’t pick out a single voice in the crowd, can’t even open her eyes — and she thinks she’s going into shock, too, which is just pathetic, but a little predictable.

Carmilla has to steel herself long enough to remember that this isn’t her mother, this is just some stupid prank; this isn’t her mother, it’s a prank. Not her mother, a prank.

Laura’s at her side, and somebody must have handed her a pool towel because she’s wrapping it around Carmilla and yelling at someone. It does nothing to stop the laughter.

The cold is starting to morph into pain, most of it centered on the still sore spot on the back of her head.

Laura says something and pulls her up and towards the house. Either the laughing dies out or it’s muffled by the shutting of the sliding glass door. She’s grateful either way.

In the house she’s less shocked and just cold and Laura pushes her into a cramped bathroom.

And the panic starts.

—

Will pitches the rest of his food into one of the trash cans by the pool, trying not to pout. He doesn’t need to feel any more childish than he already does now — surrounded by upperclassmen — but he’s furious from the moment that cooler is dumped over Carmilla’s head. The guys laugh, and had it been anybody else he might have too, but he’s as protective of his sister as she is of him and he can’t help but feel like taking it out on someone.

Will tries to fight his way through the crowd, but Laura beats him to it. She’s helping Carmilla to her feet and has a hand on her back. Laura is sweet and kind of perfect for Carmilla — loving and selfless, from what he’s seen of her. Not to mention he’s heard just about everything there is to know about Laura Hollis from his sister, but he had his suspicions that Carmilla was probably biased.

(He was wrong. Laura is the closest thing to a saint he's ever met.)

She makes Carmilla happy and he was naive enough to think maybe she could be enough to fix the broken parts of Carmilla.

She wasn’t.

Carmilla still picks fights every other day. He still finds her with cuts and bruises, sore spots and split lips, she’s still so angry all the time, which is and isn’t a surprise to him. Carmilla fights, Carmilla gets hurt, Carmilla gets angry, and she fights some more. He doesn’t know who she goes to — if he did they’d be dead, he’s sure of it. She never gives him a name and sometimes he wonders if it’s a different person every time. But the bruises are always the same, and there are patterns. So, he’s not sure. Until she had come out to him, he had assumed it was a boyfriend. Someone abusive, and he’d asked her as much, only getting a laugh and a confession in response. Not the way my door swings, William.
That hadn’t made much sense to him, but maybe he was being sexist. Maybe a girl could be abusive — outliers exist in statistics, too.

But now there was Laura. And Laura is sweet and pretty and a little bit dorky. And he’s pretty sure Carmilla is falling for her because once he’d asked about her, she never shut up about Laura Hollis.

She’d forced him to watch the Breakfast Club and four seasons of Glee. That’s probably as close to a declaration of love as his sister gets.

But even with Laura around, she still comes home with bruises. She’s still sore and he tracks the pain medications she keeps in the medicine cabinet to see just how bad it’s getting. It got worse for a while and he thought maybe Laura had rejected her. But nothing ever came of that theory, Carmilla and Laura were practically inseparable.

And maybe he’s jealous.

No, he’s definitely jealous. And borderline angry. Because Laura is taking Carmilla into the house, and it’s not hard to imagine the questions she’s going to ask.

Why are you panicking? Why do you not want a change of clothes? Why are you covered in bruises? Why does nobody take care of you? Who did this?

He’s almost seeing red, because he realizes in that moment that Carmilla is probably willing to tell Laura the things that she still keeps from him, six years later.

Six years of being in the dark for him, but Laura has known Carmilla for maybe six weeks and she’s already closer than he’s ever been to knowing his sister’s secrets.

He crushes a soda can in his hand and pitches it too.

—

The atmosphere around the pool dissolves into groups — the boys still laughing around the now empty cooler, the Summer Society girls who could care less about Carmilla but are ready to pick a fight with a Zeta for any reason, and lastly: Perry. Selfless Perry, as usual.

She’s frowning at the boys and fidgeting with her purse on the picnic table, probably looking for a first-aid kit of some type.

She looks worried, and they do feel bad about ducking inside to get away from everybody, but they’ll apologize later.

LaFontaine slides through the door while everyone is distracted and makes it to the kitchen before they get caught.

Laura’s Dad is at the table, a tube of icing in his hand. He looks up from where he’s decorating Laura’s cake — a pretty impressive towered structure that looks like a mix of a wedding cake and a kindergartener’s doodle. “Hey, you kids need something?”

They smile a little. “Is this what you’ve been doing all day? I thought you were baking.”

He nods and drops the tube of icing. The cake has the letters ‘h-a-p-p-y b-i-r-t-h” written in delicate script, and the first four letters look almost professional, which tells them Perry did those for him. “Yeah, I started cooking at seven this morning, you know, I figured I’d screw it up at least twice along the way. But I did okay and then your girlfriend showed me how to do the letters.”
(They can’t explain how good it feels to hear that.)

“She’s uh, much better than I am at this.”

They drop into a chair next to him and pick up a tube of pink icing. “Well, lucky for you, I learned from the best. And I’ve had a bit more practice.”

He looks hurt and points to the top of the cake. “What are you talking about, it’s finished.”

LaFontaine almost believes he’s serious until they both laugh at the fancily written Happy Birth.

“I’m kidding. Please save me.” He pushes a few more tubes of unopened icing at them and a pair of scissors. They cut the edge off the bottom of one and hand it to him.

“It’s way easier if you just cut a small hole and squeeze it through there. The smaller the better, really.”

“Oh. That’s ingenious.” He pushes the cake between them and they get to work, LaFontaine trying to rectify the mistakes he’d already made on the first few letters.

“So, why aren’t you out with the other kids?”

LaFontaine scratches behind their neck. “Ah, I just…”

“You can talk to me, you know. If I’m cool enough to talk about feelings and stuff.”

(Some things never change, and Laura’s Dad is one of them.

Laura is beyond lucky.)

“It’s fine, I don’t really feel like talking about it. Thanks, though.” They shrug and rotate the cake to get better access to the ‘B’.

“Alright, well can I talk?”

That surprises them, but they nod. “Yeah, what’s up, pops?”

He groans. “You make you sound like an old man.”

“Better than ‘Mr. Hollis’ though.”

“I feel like my old man when Perry calls me that.” He rolls up the end of a tube of white frosting.

“I’ve tried to get her to call you Papa Hollis, but she hasn’t really warmed up to it yet.” They laugh a little and then wait for him to say something.

It takes a few minutes of silence and then they realize he was serious about needing to talk.

“Have you ever done something – or maybe not exactly done something, but you’re thinking about it. And you know there’s technically nothing wrong with it, but you still can’t help but feel wrong about it?”

For a second, LaFontaine forgets he’s talking about himself and not them. “All. The. Time.”

“Yeah? I don’t just sound like a crazy old man right now?”

They turn the cake again, focusing on the ‘R’. “No, you do sound like a crazy old man.” He laughs
and they continue, “But I know how you feel. It’s kind of what I’m going through right now.” They hesitate before running their free hand through their hair. “I was sort of… bummed, I guess. Earlier, when all those kids from our school showed up.”

He nods and his eyes widen at the spot on the cake he’s focused on. “Trust me, you’re not the only one. No father really enjoys the idea of an army of teenage boys around his sixteen year old daughter.”

LaFontaine wonders if he has any clue how little he needs to worry about that. “I don’t think it should be much of a problem.”

He looks them in the eyes and there’s a hint of a smile on his face. “You’re probably right. So tell me, why were you upset about them?”

“I guess I sort of figured it would be just Laura, Danny, Carmilla, and Perry and I.”

That seems to make sense to him, and they’re grateful that they don’t need to explain it. He nods. “They don’t know, do they?”

“Only about ten people do.” LaFontaine focuses their attention on the cake between them, trying to fight through their shyness. There’s something about Laura’s Dad that makes them feel safe, but it’s hard. It’s always been hard. “When the guys started showing up, we had to… I mean we basically had to jump back in the closet. And it’s just — being with Perry is supposed to feel wrong, according to everybody else. But it’s always felt right.”

He nods, and LaFontaine is starting to think he definitely lives up to everything Laura has ever said about him being the greatest Dad in the world.

“And there’s this guy that I’ve been seeing.” His eyebrows raise immediately but they shake their head. “No, no, it’s not like that, he’s just a friend of mine. But I don’t think my family gets that. My Mom loves him, and I mean he’s great, don’t get me wrong, but whenever I spend time with him, my parents just kind of… treat me better. It finally feels like I’m doing something right.” LaFontaine reaches across the table for the blue icing and toys with the edge of it before they try to apply just enough to fix the decorative lines on the side of the cake. “But at the same time it still feels wrong. I feel like I’m using him. Like a… like a beard, I guess.”

“What does Perry think?”

They laugh, but it’s a hollow one.

“Ah. Well,” He stands to move towards the other side of the kitchen. “There’s your problem.” He takes two sodas from the refrigerator door and drops one in front of LaFontaine.

They nod. “Trust me, I know.”

“If it helps, I’m in the same boat.” The soda can hisses when he opens it.

“Yeah?”

“There’s a… there’s a woman that I might be sort of interested in.”

LaFontaine raises an eyebrow.

“She’s really great, smart, beautiful, the whole nine yards. But I can’t bring myself to tell Laura.” He fidgets with the Pepsi can and LaFontaine opens the one he brought them. “I still feel like I’m
cheating on her Mom every time I’m around her.”

“Tough call to make.”

“Don’t I know it.”

He hasn’t put too much effort into decorating, so they give up too, dropping the icing into a pile of supplies once they finish the last line. “I should probably go back outside before Perr starts to get worried.”

“That’s a good idea. But hey, if you ever need to talk, you know where to find me, right? I’m a good listener. Makes me feel useful without putting in too much effort, you know?”

They try to smile, but that hits a little too close to home.

“My Dad used to say that exact same thing.” They wipe some of the condensation off the side of the soda can and rub it between their fingers. “He’d say ‘I’ve always got time to hear what my little girl’s gotta say. Now your Momma, that’s another story. She’ll just nag me all day long.’” It almost scares them how easy it is to slip into the southern accent they’ve worked for years to get rid of.

“Well, have you tried opening up to your Dad? Maybe he’d listen to what you have to say.”

They can see where Laura gets it from.

LaFontaine shakes their head. “I can’t. I’m uh, I’m not his little girl anymore.”

—

“I’m so sorry, I can’t believe they did that.” Laura yanks a towel from the rack on her wall and wraps it around Carmilla, taking the already damp one and tossing it in the hamper. It takes her about as long to realize she’s standing in just a bathing suit as it does Carmilla — who looks down in the same moment that Laura pulls a towel to herself.

“God, you’re dripping wet. You know what? I’m gonna get you a shirt.” She secures the towel around her chest. “Take your shirt off, I’ll be back.”

Laura slips out of the guest bathroom and Carmilla can hear her stampeding through the house towards her room. The panic is starting to blend together now. Her entire system is in shock, whether it’s from the sudden assault — something she’s never been equipped to handle with grace — or from Laura. She’ll be back any second now, and Carmilla has absolutely nothing to say, nothing to do. She had planned for the party, she had planned her excuses, but she hadn’t planned for any this. She can’t possibly think of something quick enough, not even with a lifetime of explanations and justifications up her sleeve. She can’t just leave, she can’t just keep the towel on, and she can’t just—

Laura is back at her side in possibly the shortest minute of Carmilla’s entire life. And her speed is impressive, because she’s already traded her swimsuit for a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. She hands Carmilla a soft navy blue t-shirt and gray sweatpants that she recognizes from one of their sleepovers.

“I’m not sure if these will fit you, but they looked like something you would actually wear. No cartoon characters on them, so.”

She can’t change here, in front of Laura, and she can barely remember her own name with the way her heart is racing, so coming up with the perfect excuse doesn’t seem to be a viable option.

She licks her lips and stalls. “Uh, maybe to bed. Are these pajamas?”
“No, they’re sweatpants.”

She knows they’re sweatpants.

“You wear sweats all the time when we hang out here.”

She knows that too.

“Maybe these just aren’t my color.”

Laura laughs. “I don’t think you really have a choice here,” She’s not wrong. “You’re kind of dripping all over my bathroom floor.” She frowns, looking concerned. “Seriously, change out of these clothes, you look like a cat that got thrown into a bathtub or something.”

“Or maybe had ice water poured over it’s head by some lackwits who decided to invade some stupid birthday party.”

Laura’s not gonna fall for this much longer and she needs to make a decision soon. The fact that Laura doesn’t flinch when she says things like that makes her both relieved and sad — she does this too often, but Laura can hold her own.

Maybe she can hold her own against a few secrets, too.

“Look, I’m really sorry about the guys, I’m gonna tell Kirsch to make them leave. But... only when you change out of these clothes.” She puts her hands on Carmilla’s shoulders, accidentally pinching a bruise she didn’t know she had. Maybe if she knew the truth things would be easier. Maybe if she tells herself that enough she’ll even start to believe it.

“I’m serious, Carm, you’re shaking.”

She is, she takes a second to glance in the mirror and she looks completely wrecked, more than she thought that she would be in this moment. She’s imagined a moment like this plenty of times, come up with elaborate explanations, explored entire conversations. The fantasies had started with Elle but Laura was no different.

Out of every scenario she’s imagined, she was never this nervous. Right now, she feels like she might vomit.

“And like, I really don’t want you to get pneumonia or anything because you’re annoying enough as it is when you’re healthy, I don’t even want to imagine what you’re like when you’re sick. I think there’s probably lots of complaining and more sarcasm than anybody should ever have to put up with. And I know you, you wouldn’t even admit to being sick until you were practically on your deathbed, and I’d have to get my Dad to drive you to the emergency room and there’d be all kinds of paperwork just because you were too stubborn to admit that you were even sick—” Laura shakes her head, “Sorry, I’m totally rambling here, aren’t I?”

Carmilla clenches her fists around the towel. “Well, that shouldn’t be news, it’s not like you ever shut the fuck up.”

She has no time to debate whether or not this is a good idea once Laura’s smile is wiped completely from her face, replaced by a quiver of her bottom lip. And she knows she’ll have to tell her and she knows it’s going to break her. Just like it breaks Carmilla, more than she likes to admit. But Laura looks like she’s been slapped and somehow Carmilla knows they’re always going to end up like this. Because she’s weak when it comes to Laura, and for whatever reason — she knows the reason, but that doesn’t mean she has to admit it nineteen times a day — she knows she won't stay away from
her.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that.”

Laura locks her jaw and narrows her eyes. There’s a fire to them that gives Carmilla hope, because sometimes she really needs that reminder that Laura isn’t as fragile as she seems. “You’re doing it again, aren’t you? You’re lashing out because you’re embarrassed about something.”

Carmilla licks her lips, scratches at her forehead and squeezes her eyes shut. “Laura—”

A look crosses Laura’s face, like suddenly something makes sense. Carmilla feels her face heat up and she’s so nauseous she could cry.

“Why don’t you want to take your shirt off in front of me?”

God, she wishes that was an accusation.

Carmilla tries to laugh it off, but the words stumble over her tongue. “Are you sure you’re— don’t you, are you not just trying to get me undressed, cutie?” And that’s probably the most fucked up mess of a sentence she’s ever tried to say.

Laura’s smile is gone now. She looks scared, genuinely scared, because of her. Her best friend is scared on her birthday because of her and she doesn’t have a clue if she can go through with this, but Laura isn’t giving her anything close to a choice.

“Carm.” Laura pauses long enough to take a deep breath. She would kill to know what’s going through her mind. “Is there another reason you didn’t want to go in the pool?”

Carmilla can feel stupid fucking tears filling her eyes because of the way Laura is looking at her. “Laura.”

Her eyes are closed now but she can hear Laura’s sharp intake of breath and she knows Laura’s on the verge of tears too. “Carm.”

She must have figured it out, or taken a close enough guess because she definitely knows something. It’s in the way her hands reach for Carmilla and her shoulders slump like she’s suddenly taken on the weight of the world — the weight of Carmilla’s world, because the look on her face will never not be Carmilla’s fault.

The quiet that hangs between them in Laura’s guest bathroom is shattered by the harsh knock on the door.

LaFontaine’s voice comes through the door. “Uh, guys? You okay in there? You kind of disappeared and I think some of the guys are worried this bathroom is like a Narnia situation, you know?”

Laura doesn’t look stable, so Carmilla clears her throat. “We’re fine.”

“Gotcha. I’ll let ‘em know.”

—

Laura has never been this angry. She can’t even think of the last time she was angry at all. Mostly because her mind is too clouded to think, but also because pretty much nothing can compare to the way she feels the moment Carmilla’s voice cracks around her name and suddenly everything makes
too much sense all at once. It’s the look on her face that does it, really. Her Dad’s crime scenes have always been off limits to her, but the police station was like a second home to her in the year after her Mom’s death when neither of them knew how to operate without their third musketeer. She’s spent hours in his office, she’s seen tragedy and heartbreak and abuse, so much abuse. And she’s furious at herself.

Laura panics briefly, wondering if all the hints she’s been given — and they’re starting to pile up in her mind, there have been so many — have been a cry for help. If Carmilla had wanted her to notice but she was too wrapped up in her own world to see it. She’ll never forgive herself.

She lets Carmilla change alone. She deserves her privacy and LaFontaine is still waiting outside the door. They make some comment about her Dad that she’ll have to ask them to repeat later when she isn’t ready to go on a rampage because someone has been hurting her best friend and she’s been so clueless for so long.

Laura slips out onto the pool deck again because she doesn’t know what else to do and it’s still her party. Also, she’s better at not crying when she’s around other people. Laura is actually surprised by the outdoors — the sun has already started to go down and the carefree atmosphere has died out for the most part. The pool is empty and almost everybody is standing around the deck in groups.

Will stands up from his seat on the ground when he sees her and her mind is racing with a thousand and one questions until he speaks.

“Finally had enough birthday sex, huh? Took you two long enough.” He says it with the kind of practiced intensity of somebody with a lot of baggage and Laura’s fists are clenching at her sides because this is so not the time, and she doesn’t know what to think about the fact that this is coming from Carmilla’s brother, of all people.

Kirsch seems to find this hilarious, as do most of the Zetas around him. “C’mon, Laura, if you kissed we won’t tell.”

“What are you talking about?”

He can’t possibly be picking up on how angry she is, because Kirsch isn’t the brightest — but he’s not stupid enough to pick on Laura on a bad day.

“Bro, you were in there with her for like. Ten days. It was just a little ice, lighten up.”

She steps up until she’s inches from his chest — which is right about where her line of sight lands, but that doesn’t stop her from wiping that grin off his face in ten seconds or less.

“You know, that’s funny, Kirsch. I forgot this is my house and I can do whatever the hell I want, so why don’t you just take a long walk off my short diving board!!” She shoves her hands into his chest and thank God he’s top heavy because she’s not all that strong, but he still goes stumbling back into the pool with a crash. With the exception of Kirsch’s sputtering, everyone is silent.

“Bro,” He spits water from his mouth. “What the hell?”

Her adrenaline is gone the moment she hears her Dad’s voice from behind her. “Laura!”

—

He leads her into the kitchen, and it’s been a few years since her Dad really yelled at her, but she’s thinking there’s a pretty good chance of him doing so right now. “What were you thinking?”
"Dad—"

"Laura, you know I want to take your side here, but you just shoved a kid into our swimming pool, do you know how dangerous that is?" He leans back to look through the window that overlooks the backyard. "He could have cracked his skull open."

"Kirsch is fine, I'll apologize later." She's still fuming, but the anger is starting to die down slowly. Her body just feels tired.

He looks shocked, and if she wasn't so shaken up, she might be too. "I don't care if he's fine, Laura you better have a good explanation for this, that's unacceptable."

She doesn't say anything because what could she say? What does she even know for certain? Nothing, because Carmilla is still hiding out in their bathroom.

"Did Kirsch try something I need to know about?"

"Dad, no."

"Did he insult you?"

"No."

"Did he do anything wrong at all? You have to give me something to work with here, Laura, since when do you go around shoving kids into water?" He sighs and she feels bad, not so much for Kirsch because really, he was being a total jerk. He sort of deserved it. But her Dad doesn't.

There's a shuffling sound and Carmilla must have heard them because she stumbles into the kitchen, coming to an awkward halt behind Laura.

"Hi. Can we talk?"

She's changed into the clothes that Laura gave her and dried her hair with a towel from the messy look of it. Carmilla's eyes are wide and frantic.

Her Dad sighs. "Can it wait?"

"Um." She meets Laura's eyes and then shakes her head. "No, it has to be right now."

He gives up. "I want a good reason for this kind of behavior when you're done. I mean it, Laura."

—

The moment her bedroom door shuts behind them, Carmilla is in her space, blocking the door. "You can’t tell anybody."

A lump forms in Laura’s throat and she swallows, nods, does everything in her power not to cry because out of the two them, she’s not the one who deserves to shed any tears over this.

"Somebody’s hurting you?"

"You can’t tell anybody." She repeats, shaking her head like it’s impossible to stop. "No one."

The no crying thing is a rule she’s going to break, but she can put it off for a little longer. Laura closes the gap that Carmilla has put between them and squeezes her arm gently. It’s just enough that she stops moving so much and the head shaking stops.
“Just tell me the truth.”

She knows the truth, they both do. But she did miss like, every single hint up until now and she needs to hear it. Carmilla just rolls her eyes like it’s the most ridiculous request she’s ever heard. Maybe it is.

“Just...” Laura bites her lip. No crying. “How bad is it?”

Carmilla looks up at the ceiling and then back down while Laura’s heart pounds. Her hand moves to rest on the collar of her shirt — Laura’s shirt — before she tugs it down to reveal a bruise just below her collarbone. It’s red, and Laura doesn’t have much experience with bruises except for the ones she gets on her knees when she falls too much during band practice, but red is sore. Red is painful. Red is recent.

Carmilla pulls up the hem of the t-shirt, revealing a few more marks. Her skin is littered with patches of bruising — most of them yellow, some of them a dark purple. There’s a mark she doesn’t recognize on Carmilla’s ribs. It’s not a bruise and it’s not a cut, and she almost wants to touch it to see if it has texture to it, but that has to be crossing some kind of line.

She pulls down the shirt suddenly. “There’s more, but. You don’t need to—” Carmilla cuts herself off and shakes her head.

“Who?”

“My Mom.”

Laura shuts her eyes, willing that mental image away. She remembers showing up to Carmilla’s house unannounced and the panic that followed.

When her Mother came home.

Her bottom lip shakes. “Was that... did you, was it my fault?” Laura’s voice cracks and she squeezes her lips together.

“No. Not your fault.”

“But when I—”

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“Okay.” She knows it’s technically true, she can’t be blamed for an abusive parent, but she still feels so guilty. For putting her in that situation, for ignoring that situation, for leaving her in that situation. “Carm, we have to tell someone. We have to get you out of there.”

She pushes forward, sliding past Laura and towards the center of the room. “I don’t want out.”

“My Dad’s a cop, we can— what do you mean you don’t want out?”

Carmilla pinches the bridge of her nose. Her hand falls back to her side and she says, “It’s— It’s not as bad as it looks. I don’t expect you to understand my situation.”

Not as bad as it looks?

“I need you to promise. You have to swear that you won’t say anything.” There’s desperation in her voice, like everything depends on this moment, right now. Laura’s choice. “Besides, if you say anything—”
“Then she’d go to jail and you’d be safe.”

Carmilla groans, running both hands through her hair — it’s starting to dry now that she’s toweled it off, but it’s tangled and knotted. “She wouldn’t. My mother has more friends than you think.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“Forget it.”

Laura takes a seat on the edge of her bed and shrugs. “Haven’t you ever thought about it? What it would be like if you told somebody that could help?” Her mouth seems to be running without her permission and Laura worries that she’s saying all the wrong things.

Carmilla drops herself on the bed next to Laura. “There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t. If she even got arrested... It would be better, but it wouldn’t be worth it. I’d go into the system. If I’m lucky, I’d get adopted or fostered or whatever. They could separate Will and I.” She picks at her fingernails absentmindedly.

“Will. “ A series of scenarios run through her mind. “Will. Does she hurt him too? Carm, we can’t let this happen, you’re both just kids—”

“Will’s fine. It’s just me. It’s always been just me. And I’m nothing to worry about, alright?” She couldn’t be more wrong, but that’s something Laura will have to prove to her another day.

“But you can’t tell him.” That urgency is back, and she meets Laura’s eyes. “Will can’t know. Please,” She almost begs, “I never want him to know. As far as he knows,” she shrugs, offering Laura a sad smile, “Our Mom loves us .”

Laura blinks back the tears in her eyes.

“And I can’t go into the system — I can’t put him through that, too. I can’t lose him, Laura. He’s all I’ve got.”

Those are really the magic words, because Laura understands loss too well. And really, her decision is made the moment she realizes that Carmilla going into the system means she could lose her.

And it’s without a doubt the most selfish decision she’ll ever make. She can tackle that moral dilemma later, when she isn’t on the verge of tears.

“You’ve got me, too.” Laura tugs at Carmilla’s hand and laces their fingers together on the bed. Pale skin against tanned skin, black polished nails between clear ones.

“I know, cupcake. I know.”

She thinks of everything that Carmilla’s been through, and it’s the worst thing she’s ever learned, but Laura is glad she knows. “Thanks for uh, thanks for telling me.”

Carmilla stands from the bed, pulling Laura with her. “We should go downstairs.”

“Yeah.” She doesn’t see a reason not to, so Laura hugs her, keeping it gentle. Carmilla hugs back almost immediately, gripping her back like she could melt into Laura. Laura’s fingers trace patterns up and down Carmilla’s skin.

She lets herself cry a little bit, though there’s not much of a choice now. She can’t remember being this sad before, even though she knows that she was once.
When Carmilla pulls back, Laura feels cool fingers wiping at her cheeks.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know why I’m crying.”

“Hey, it’s fine. Don’t cry.”

Laura laughs through a sniffle. “I don’t get it.” Her hands slide down Carmilla’s arms. “Why are you the one taking care of me right now?”

Carmilla stands up tall, putting on some show of confidence. “Well, girls taking care of other girls is important, right? What can I say, I guess I’m a feminist.”

Laura pushes away from her, but they’re both laughing now. “Shut up, I already know you’re a feminist.”

“Good.”

—

Laura feeds him some story about being upset over an accusation that Kirsch made about her and Carmilla, and Mark doesn’t really believe it because there’s something Laura isn’t telling him. There’s something everyone isn’t telling him, not even LaFontaine, who he’d kind of expected more from after their bonding session.

Sort of bonding session. There was talking, it had a bonding vibe to it.

He decides to let it go because everyone is kind of upset, and Laura looks like she’s been crying, which is no way to spend a sixteenth birthday.

The first thing he does is kick out everyone he doesn’t know by name. The second thing is instating a rule that doesn’t allow any more than five boys in their house at once, for his own mental health.

(Barb was right, co-ed parties are a disaster.)

Kirsch offers Laura an apology on his way out, and he can hear them talking in the hallway.

“It totally wasn’t cool of me, I’m sorry.” There’s a rustling sound, like a gift bag, and Kirsch says, “I’m gonna take off but... happy birthday.”

“Kirsch, you don’t have to go. And I’m sorry, too. For pushing you in the pool. Also totally not cool.”

Mark smiles.

“It’s cool, I’m Will’s ride and uh... don’t tell her this, but I don’t want Danny to walk home alone at night. It’s starting to get pretty dark.”

“She’d kill you if she heard that.”

“Yeah, I know.”

He hears more rustling and then, “Thank you. I’ll text you when I open it.”

“Cool.”

Laura sighs. “C’mon, give me a hug.”
They’re silent for a few minutes and then he hears Kirsch place a kiss to the top of Laura’s head — or at least that’s what he thinks he hears, because it’s what Kirsch always does when Laura’s upset.

“Bye, Kirsch.”

“See ya, Laura.”

She says a few more goodbyes because Laura is a great host, with the exception of the rare near-fatal injury. He’s glad when it’s just the usual gang (minus Danny) in the living room. LaFontaine sits in the armchair with Perry at their feet, and they look happier than they have all day while they run their hands through Perry’s hair. Laura and Carmilla are practically curled in on each other, taking up a singular cushion of the couch. Carmilla has her head reclined against Laura’s chest and Laura’s arms are crossed over her.

He’s not supposed to ask about that, Danny had explained it to him the other day — sort of. But he’s okay with not knowing.

They retired the cake for the night — it’s a nice one, but Laura’s birthday is tomorrow anyway, so it can wait a day. Maybe she’ll be happier in the morning. For now, she’s content to watch sitcoms with her friends, and he leaves them alone in the living room in the middle of a commercial break.

It’s easily one of the worst birthdays he’s given Laura, and he honestly feels a little bit like a failure.

—

The ginger twins finally leave some time around 9pm, and even though Carmilla is trying to like them — for Laura — she’s relieved that they do.

They clean up the mess from Kirsch’s present in silence. The floor is covered in candy wrappers that Carmilla and LaFontaine had worked their way through at an alarming rate — with some help from Laura and Perry — sometime between their sixth and seventh episode of *Friends*. The beefcake has good taste in sweets and Laura offered her another candy every time she got that sad look on her face, the one that usually came with a stroke of Carmilla’s hair or a kiss on her forehead.

She lets Laura take care of her because sometimes it’s nice to be taken care of and when it comes down to it, she’s falling pretty hard for this girl and even that feels nice, despite how hopeless the situation is.

Except for right now, when Laura still hasn’t said anything to her in hours and she kind of feels like everything is her fault. Maybe Laura just needs time to adjust.

“So. I should take off.” She points a thumb over her shoulder towards the door.

Laura looks panicked, “You don’t have to go.” She sets down the garbage bin she was collecting wrappers in and takes Carmilla’s hand. “Stay the night?”

It feels a lot like pity but she’s exhausted and a little powerless against Laura so she nods.

Laura’s Dad shows up again to wish them goodnight and hug Laura before they take heavy steps up the stairs and into Laura’s room. Carmilla tugs at the hem of the shirt Laura changed into.

“Hey,” She grimaces. “Sorry for ruining your birthday, I guess.”

She says, “Don’t say that,” and moves to fold down the bed like it’s an easy enough notion to erase. Like she can just forgive herself at the drop of a hat.
She envies Laura’s outlook on things.

“Should I take the floor?” They spend the night here a lot, but almost exclusively in the basement, the only exception being the time they fell asleep in the living room and woke up to Laura’s father leaving for work.

Laura looks between the bed and Carmilla and she looks completely drained, so it doesn’t even come as a surprise when she shrugs. “The bed’s big enough for the two of us.”

On any other day, that kind of sentence would have made her heart race.

Carmilla climbs into the bed, claiming the yellow pillow on the left side of it and collapsing between the sheets. Laura’s bed is about a thousand times more comfortable than her own, and it has Laura, so that’s a big plus.

Laura switches off the light on her nightstand and rolls over to face her. The tardis nightlight on her desk is barely enough light to brighten Laura’s features, but she can see the curve of her face and the look in her eyes, so that’s enough. A hand reaches up to Carmilla’s face, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. Laura looks from her lips to her eyes and frowns.

Carmilla’s tongue darts out to lick her lips. They’re chapped. “What is it?”

“I can’t figure it out.” Laura taps her chin with the pad of her thumb and her hands comes to rest in a fist on the pillow.

“Figure what out?”

“You.”

She’s about to respond when she notices Laura’s eyes slide shut and her mouth relaxes.

“Goodnight, creampuff.” Carmilla presses a kiss to her forehead.

Laura still smells like chlorine from the pool.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
The numbers switch on the screen of Carmilla’s phone and she quickly slams her hand on it to turn off the alarm. She shifts a little bit so that she's almost on her side and scratches lightly up Laura's arm, "Laura."

Laura barely moves and Carmilla tries again, switching to shaking her shoulder softly and raising her voice slightly, "Laura, wake up."

"Hmm?"

"Wake up, cupcake."

Laura tries to open her eyes and fails, "What's wrong?"

"It's midnight."

"Thanks for sharing. Now go back to bed," Laura yawns and smashes her face back into Carmilla's collarbone, adjusting herself so she's wrapped a bit tighter around Carmilla's body.

Carmilla almost laughs, "Laura, come on."

Laura blows out a sigh against her skin. It tickles in the best possible way, "Carm, please. I'm tired."

"You're also sixteen."

"Huh?"

Carmilla rolls her eyes, "It's midnight. Happy Birthday, cutie."

Laura’s eyes open and she furrows her brow before her face relaxes into a smile, “Really?”

“Really,” she reaches for her phone from the nightstand and puts it in front of Laura’s face, clicking the lock button to show the time, “Technically it’s 12:02. You spent the first two minutes of your birthday sleeping, but that’s your fault, not mine.”

Laura grins and scrunches her face, burying it into Carmilla’s neck and letting out a quiet squeal. She rocks in excitement before pulling back, “It’s my birthday.”
The smile grows on Carmilla’s face, “You wouldn’t say.”

“*Shut up* - it’s my *birthday!*” Laura sits up suddenly and bounces on her side of the bed, her enthusiasm almost contagious.

Carmilla props herself up on her elbows, laughing softly and whispering, “You’re gonna wake up your dad.”

“Who *cares*, it’s my birthday!”

“You know I have this strange feeling that today has some sort of significance.”

“I said shut up,” Laura pushes her shoulder and she can’t stop the wince and sharp breath she takes. That’s been a particularly sore spot and maybe it’s the fact that she’s been up since 6am that is making her usually quick reflexes to hide her pain a bit sluggish. Laura’s eyes widen immediately and she pulls her hands back like her skin is contaminated, “Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I didn’t-”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry,” she shifts until her feet hang off the bed, reaching for the present sitting beside the nightstand, “Um, I wanted to give you your present.”

Laura is still frozen in place when Carmilla turns back into a sitting position and she rolls her eyes as she nudges the present in front of her, “Seriously, just - can we please not do this now? I really want you to enjoy your present.” Laura tugs her lip between her teeth and Carmilla lets out a groan before ripping a tear in the edge of the wrapping, “If you don’t hurry up I’m going to end up opening it for you.”

Laura looks like the mere idea is breaking about fifty different laws, so with a reluctant face, she starts ripping at the wrapping. It takes her less than a minute to leave a pile of shredded paper in it’s place - she may be slightly upset, but she’s still clearly excited for her birthday - before she starts laughing.

Okay, not exactly the reaction Carmilla is hoping to get out of her.

“You’re such a goof.”

“Um, what?”

Laura just shakes her head and goes to open the box. When it’s opened she freezes, slowly looking up at Carmilla with wide eyes, “Carmilla, this is a real camera.”

“As opposed to a fake one?”

“No, I just - I saw the box and laughed because I thought it was a *joke*. You know, like a fake box and the real present is inside,” Laura looks down and stares for a few seconds before looking back up at Carmilla with a blank expression, “It’s a camera.”

“Yeah, listen, if you don’t like it I made sure to keep the gift receipt.”

Laura’s eyes go even wider - if that was possible - and she shakes her head quickly, “No! I’m - Carm, this is a *Rebel*.”

Carmilla is thankful that tardis nightlight isn’t fully lighting her face because she’s sure it’s red, “Yeah, sorry, I did a bit of research, though, and I’m pretty sure that’s a good brand?”

(More like three days of Google searches and calling three different stores for questions about brands
“If it’s shitty I can just exchange it for a better one.” Laura lets out another laugh and Carmilla crosses her arms, “Okay, you don’t have to be an asshole about it.”

“Carmilla,” Laura pulls the camera out and reverently runs her fingers around it, “This is one of the best presents I’ve ever gotten. It’s just - Carm, it’s way too much.”

The weight on her chest starts to lighten and she lets out a small sigh of relief, “It’s not a big deal, don’t worry about it. And, uh, it’s the big 16 so, you know. Whatever.”

Laura bites her lip and starts to grin as she holds the camera up to her eye, looking in the viewfinder, “This is the coolest thing in the world.”

Carmilla laughs. The lens cap is still on.

“Yeah, well. It’s great for photos but also good for videos, too. And, you know, every good journalist needs a good camera, right?”

Laura brings the camera down and stares at her with shining eyes, “Carm-”

“Oh God,” Carmilla runs a hand through her knotty hair, “No more tears today, please? This was supposed to be the one good moment of your birthday.”

Laura puts the camera down and scrambles forward in a rush, suddenly stopping right in front of Carmilla. She looks torn and glances down at Carmilla’s body, “Is it okay if I hug you? Or will it…” she trails off and sighs, her eyes still shining.

“Laura,” Carmilla’s chest tightens and she tries to swallow the lump in her throat, “You can always hug me.”

It’s all she needs to hear because she’s reaching up and delicately wrapping her arms around Carmilla’s shoulder. Carmilla sighs into her hair and reaches up to pull her closer, “Seriously, Happy Birthday. You deserve one.”

(If anyone is going to be happy, it might as well be Laura. She has a chance.)

Laura nuzzles into her neck and presses a soft kiss to her shoulder, “Thank you. For everything.”

Laura pulls back and Carmilla is worried that she actually will start crying at any moment, “It’s nothing, honestly. But, uh, you’ve had a few hours sleep and I’ve been awake this whole time. Do you mind if we head back to bed? You can freak out about your camera tomorrow - I promise it will still be there.” She throws in a small smile in for good measure and it seems to work for Laura.

“Yeah, of course,” Laura gently puts the camera back into the box and puts it on the floor. She wipes the paper mess off her bed and lies back down, looking up at Carmilla with a grin, “I can’t believe you stayed up until midnight to give me my present.”

Carmilla stills before trying to appear aloof as she lies back down and faces Laura, “I did not stay up just because of your birthday.”

“I heard the alarm.”

Carmilla pauses and in the soft glow of the light she can see Laura’s smile widen.

(Shes’s so beautiful. Annoying, but beautiful.)
“You were asleep. It took me minutes to wake you up.”

“I’m a light sleeper. Doesn’t mean I don’t like trying to go back to sleep.”

Well, Carmilla really has nothing to say to that so she turns around, “I’m too tired for this conversation.”

She hears Laura’s soft giggle from behind her and is grateful Laura can’t see the look of happiness on her face right now.

A few minutes pass before she feels warm hands snake around her waist. She stills before relaxing into it.

“Is this okay?”

The voice is soft and the underlying sadness to her tone cuts into Carmilla’s heart. She reaches up and laces their fingers, pulling Laura closer until she feels her pressed against her back.

(It’s more than okay.)

“I just - you’re so important to me and I know you’re not ready to talk but - I just want to hold you close.”

The words cut deeper into her chest, but in the good way - the way that means maybe she’s starting to make room for some goodness in there.

The word come out shakier than she hopes, “Thanks.”

Laura is silent for a while and Carmilla is about to drift off to sleep when she hears a whisper against her hair, “You didn’t ruin my birthday. Having you here with me is the best gift.”

Carmilla smiles into the darkness, “I wish I knew that before dropping all that cash on the camera.”

Laura laughs into the back of her neck, her breath sending goosebumps down her spine.

“Goodnight, Carm.”

“Night, cupcake.”

(Laura makes her feel so much - but as she’s lying in this bed, something new washes over her. She’s been trying to figure it out and with Laura’s face buried in her neck and arm tucked around her side, she finally gets it.

She feels safe.)

-----

“LaFontaine, you know that I know you’re eating the frosting even though I can’t see you, right?”

LaFontaine stills, sucking the last of the frosting off of their fingertips, “I know your rule about tasting, Perr.”

“And I know your penchant for breaking the rules.”

They smile, sneaking one more dip before going back to mixing the bowl, “I plead the fifth.”
They hear a huff behind them and their smile grows wider.

“You can’t plead the fifth if I haven’t even asked you a question yet.”

They turn around and shrug, bringing the bowl with them. Perry is furiously stirring the cupcake batter and LaFontaine pouts.

“You’ve got your Master Chef face on.”

“And why do you sound so upset about that?”

“Because you know I love your Master Chef face. It’s too cute. And if you’re going to stand there with your Master Chef face and be too cute then I’m just going to have to walk over there and kiss you,” they sigh dramatically, “But we’re supposed to be baking, so I can’t do that.”

Perry slows her stirring, a tiny smile breaking across her lips, “According to you, you love all of my faces.”

“This is a true fact.”

Perry hesitates, “You know we have a strict schedule to stick to.”

They nod, “I know.”

“My mom is going to be home soon for brunch and we’ll need to have these ready for afterwards.”

“I know,” they sigh again, “It’s an honest to God tragedy, Perry.”

“We don’t really have any time to waste.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

Perry stops her stirring and looks up at LaFontaine, “Frosting or batter?”

“What?”

“Just pick one.”

They shrug, “Frosting.”

Perry puts her spoon down and turns, taking a few steps towards them. She dips her finger into the frosting bowl and smudges it across LaFontaine’s bottom lip.

(This is how they’re going to die. They hope they play good music at their funeral.)

“I wasn’t aware that we were decorating me this morning.”

“Shut up, sweetie.”

(Yeah - shut up, LaFontaine.)

They hold their breath as Perry leans in, brushing her lips against theirs at the most agonizingly slowest pace LaFontaine has ever experienced. Perry grins as she deepens the kiss, removing all of the frosting from their lips.

(What is the protocol if they just accidentally smear more frosting on their lips?)
Perry leans back with a grin, a tiny bit of frosting on the edge of her lips. She darts her tongue out and licks it off.

(They’ve lived a good life. This is one amazing way to go.)

“There. You got your kiss. Satisfied?”

“I’m not sure, you’ll have to try again for me to really know for sure.”

Perry rolls her eyes and laughs, leaning forward for another quick peck before walking back over to the bowl, “Is the oven pre-heated?”

They sigh. Kissing time truly is over if Perry is already back in baking mode.

“Yup. It should be ready soon.”

Perry hums under her breath and LaFontaine passes her the cupcake tray. They hold it steady while she slowly pours measured batter into each shell.

They jump at the sudden sound of the front door and Perry’s mom bustling into the kitchen.

(Thank God she didn’t show up a few minutes earlier.)

“Hey kids,” Perry’s mom rushes into the kitchen and drops a few bags of groceries on the counter. She comes over and gives Perry a kiss on the cheek before giving LaFontaine a quick one-armed hug around their shoulder, “Are you baking?”

“Yeah, we were going to try the new coconut recipe.”

She looks between them and gives them both a look, “‘You didn’t get my texts, did you?’

Perry shakes her head, “No? We left our phones in my room.”

Perry’s mom frowns, “Afraid I have some bad news, then. I tried texting you, but we’re going to have to cancel brunch today.”

LaFontaine’s stomach drops. This is their favourite day of the week and they don’t want to miss another one.

(Except this means that they’ll still get the day with Perry. And that’s always something to look forward to for them.)

Perry looks just as disappointed, “What happened?”

“The mediator is available to meet this afternoon and if we don’t catch this appointment we’re going to have to wait another three weeks. So we have to take advantage of this. Which is giving me monumental stress since I’ve had to rearrange my whole day, but I’ll worry about that later.”

Perry sighs, “Well, that’s fine. I guess we’ll just whip something up and I’ll leave it on the counter for you later.”

Perry’s mom shakes her head, “No, honey, you have to come with us.”

“Why?”

Perry and her mom look to them and they can feel their face heat up. Perry’s mom frowns, “I’m
sorry, LaFontaine, but she has to come because the mediator has to ask her some questions about college.”

(So much for a day with Perry.)

“Perry has had the same college picked out since she was thirteen - we all know this.”

“Mom, listen, I’ll go grab my stuff and-”

“Yes, but now that she’s been broadening her options it requires more discussion.”

LaFontaine steps back and turns to Perry, “Broadening your options?”

Perry darts her eyes, “Yes. It’s silly, really. Just a few random schools added to the list.”

“Since when does it even require a list?”

The room is silent and Perry’s mom grabs her purse, “Listen, I’ll put these groceries away later since none of them need to go in the fridge. Can you go get your things? We’re kind of on a time limit here.”

Perry nods and her mom smiles, “Perfect. I’ll meet you in the car,” she turns towards LaFontaine, “I’m sorry again, honey. I’ll make your favourite next week to make up for it, okay?”

They muster a smile, “Thanks.”

She returns their smile and rushes out the door. The minute it slams shut the kitchen is weighed down by tense silence. Perry bites her lip and plays with the hem of her shirt, “Listen, what she was talking about - it’s not a big deal. She’s just been throwing schools at me lately since it’s been brought up so much with my dad. And you know how she is when she gets an idea about something: she just won’t shut up about it. So instead of fighting her on it I just told her I would consider a few.”

Perry steps forward and laces their fingers together. LaFontaine ignores how it burns in a way that they’re not familiar with.

( Maybe it’s the first touch she’s ever given that LaFontaine has started to doubt.)

“But, it really doesn’t matter because it’s not like I’ll actually go to any of those schools.”

LaFontaine knows Perry. They’ve known her for years and they know what it means when she rambles. It means that she’s nervous and unsure and rationalizing.

Ultimately, it means that she’s lying.

(Whether it’s to herself or LaFontaine doesn’t matter at this point.)

They nod, “Right.”

“LaFontaine-”

“No, it’s okay. Honestly.” They step back and walk to the stove, turning it off.

“I was going to talk to you, really.”

They step back towards them, “I know. But your mom is waiting. We’ll talk later, okay?”
Perry nods and leans in but they brush to the side, her lips hitting the side of their cheek instead. They quickly turn towards the stairs so they can run up and grab their phone.

(They don’t have it in themselves to deal with the hurt look on her face. They don’t have it in themselves to deal with anything right now.)

-----

Carmilla shifts on her side and stretches out across the bed. The other side is cold and for a brief moment she thinks she’s back at home in her own bed. The idea is squashed away almost immediately because she knows her mattress and Laura’s new one is like sleeping on a cloud. She frowns to herself; part of her - and she hates to admit it - was looking forward to waking up in Laura’s arms.

She grabs her phone and looks at it through one eye: 12:14pm. She groans and throws it on the other side of the bed, stretching one more time before trying to sit up. She blows out a long breath - that ice really did a number on some of her larger bruises - and pushes past the pain.

She’s about to go look for Laura when she startles. Laura is sitting at her desk and typing furiously on the keyboard. She has her headphones in and from the way she’s bopping her head, Carmilla guesses that she has her One Direction playlist going.

“What’s up, cupcake?”

She’s answered with silence as Laura continues to move her head in time to the music. Carmilla rolls her eyes and walks towards the desk. She goes to make a joke but it dies in her throat as she sees what’s on Laura’s screen. There’s a tab open with some article about domestic abuse and lists of resources. Carmilla feels a cool chill at the bottom of her stomach. She steps forward and taps Laura lightly on the shoulder.

Laura slams the laptop shut and rips her earphones out, “Oh my God, you scared me.”

“Yeah, I can clearly see that,” Carmilla licks her lips, “What were you doing?”

Laura tenses, “Just catching up on some homework.”

“Amazing. I had no idea you were studying about domestic abuse.”

Laura frowns and looks down, “Carm, listen-”

“Laura, seriously, don’t worry about it.”

Laura shoots her head up and lets out a humourless laugh, “Don’t worry about it? Carm, you’re being hurt. Really badly.”

Carmilla lets out a groan and shakes her head, walking back towards the bed. She throws herself on it and hugs her knees to her chest, “There’s nothing you can do about it.”

Laura walks over and sits down next to her, “I’ve been looking some stuff up this morning after breakfast and there are some things we can do.”

Carmilla grins, sick and sarcastic, “Oh, you did? That’s amazing, Laura. It’s not like I would have already looked those kinds of things up years ago.” Laura looks like she’s had her heart stomped in but Carmilla can’t stop the words tripping out of her mouth, “And there is no we. This is something I have to deal with on my own.”
(She’s ruining it again. She always ruins everything.)

“Well look how great on your own has worked out for you so far.”

She sucks in a breath and the tears spring to her eyes before she can reach up and wipe them away. She’s no stranger to the blame game, but it usually comes in the form of wicked words spoken from the woman who raised her. This is different. This is Laura and she was never supposed to look at her like that, or at least she hoped she wouldn’t and now the room is closing in on her and-

“No, no - Carm,” Laura scoots closer and reaches up to lift Carmilla’s chin, shaking her head as she wipes a few stray tears away, “I didn’t mean it like that. This is not your fault. In any way.” She reaches up and cradles Carmilla’s face with both hands until she’s forced to look at her, “I just meant that it’s okay to ask for help. It’s okay to become a we.”

She takes in a shaky breath, looking down and shrugging out of Laura’s grasp, “Laura, this is just a lot right now. I haven’t told anyone about this before, and now you’re threatening to change things when they’re fine just the way they are - I can’t risk it.”

Laura scoffs, “Fine just the way they are-”

“They are,” Carmilla looks up at her, “I can handle it. I already told you, there’s the broken system and Will - I don’t know what happens with him - and honestly, who is really going to believe someone like me?”

She doesn’t hesitate, “I would believe you. I do believe you.”

(Of course she does. She knew it the minute they watched that stupid movie together, but Carmilla never wanted to give her a reason to believe.)

Her face crumbles, “Yeah, because you’re a fucking saint on this goddamn Earth.”

Laura smiles at that and leans against her headboard. She opens up her arms, “Come here.”

Everything feels a bit too heavy this morning for her to resist it with a witty retort. Carmilla folds herself over Laura’s chest and wraps her arms tightly around her waist, allowing Laura to run her fingers slowly through her hair.

“We don’t have to talk about all of this right now. I’m sorry for pushing.”

Carmilla sighs, “You just care. There’s nothing wrong with caring.”

(Except when it comes to her. Because now she’s starting to care too much.)

“Of course I care. You deserve to be cared about.”

That’s debatable. “Thanks,” she closes her eyes as Laura starts to scratch her scalp. She matches her breathing to go with the rise and fall of Laura’s chest. It settles a warm calm inside of her.

“My mom used to take me to this coffee shop when she was alive. Every Thursday - no matter what - we would go.”

Carmilla opens her eyes and shifts so she can look up at her. Laura doesn’t talk that much about her mom, but when she does there’s almost a soft reverence in her voice. It’s special in all the important ways and Carmilla tries to pay as much attention as she can.

“We would just read and drink too much hot chocolate together and it was just really, really nice.
She was the first person who encouraged my interest in journalism, actually,” she moves her hand to Carmilla’s forehead to play with her bangs, “Our favourite book is *The Neverending Story* and there’s this quote that talks about how all words and stories come from the same twenty-six letters.” Laura rubs her eyes, “Uh, before she died she bought me this really old edition of the book - I don’t even know why we didn’t own it yet, maybe because we just liked reading the used copies in the store. But she wrote an inscription on the inside cover. It was, uh,” Laura reaches on her nightstand for the book and struggles to open it with one hand while she continues to play with Carmilla’s hair with the other.

(She notices that book every time she’s visited. Now she gets it.)

“Yeah, so she wrote: *You’ll always have a voice, my love. Never forget the power of those twenty-six letters.*”

“That’s really wonderful. She sounds amazing.”

Laura nods, “She is - um, was. And I used to think people were ridiculous if they didn’t get along with their moms, because mine was so amazing.” She sighs before looking down at Carmilla sadly, “Now I get it.”

Carmilla can’t look Laura in the eye. She stares at the fabric of her shirt and starts to draw patterns on the hem. This is exactly what she wanted to avoid: tainting Laura’s world, turning it cynical. Laura doesn’t need that kind of pessimism; Laura is the sun and Carmilla is swallowing her up with the night sky.

“Laura, don’t let my situation ruin your idea of your mother.”

“No, I don’t. I love my mom - I always will. But she loved me, too, and your mom-”

“My mom does love me.”

Silence blankets the bedroom and Carmilla feels another lump forming in the back of her throat. After a few seconds Laura wraps her arm around Carmilla’s shoulder and squeezes, “Okay.” Laura uses her other hand to play with Carmilla’s fingers, “Do you feel up for going downstairs for a bit? I already opened presents from my dad - oh, he *did* get me a new laptop! But, yeah, we saved the cake so that we could all do it together.”

“Laura, it’s your birthday - we can do whatever you want.”

Laura smiles, “That’s a lot of power you’re giving me.”

She looks up at her and feels so pathetic, but: “Can we just lay here for a while before going?”

“Of course. My dad probably thinks you’re still sleeping, anyway, so it’s not that far of a stretch.”

Carmilla laughs, “Shut up, I don’t sleep in that late.”

“You’re basically nocturnal.”

“*Whatever.*”

Laura’s laughter fills the room and Carmilla smiles into her shirt.

(No matter what happens, Carmilla will always remember these moments.)

-----
Kirsch parks his truck in the visitors’ parking lot of the hospital and grabs the take-out container from the passenger seat as he walks towards the entrance.

Well, it’s not real take-out from a restaurant or anything; he made the dinner at home and then packed it away to take to his mom. He’s been kind of short on gas money lately and he’s hoping this will put her in a good enough mood to lend him some.

(Plus, it’s like totally in a legitimate imitation take-out container he bought from the dollar store and everything. It’s the thought that counts.)

The moment he walks through the doors he weaves his way through a frantic group of patients and approaches the information desk. The woman on the phone rolls her eyes before looking over him and replacing her expression with a large smile. She holds her finger up to signal him to wait and he nods with a soft smile.

After a few minutes she slams the phone, “They don’t pay me enough for this.”

“You should be running this place, Jackie,” Kirsch grins, “How’s my favourite girl doing?”

Jackie waves her hand at him, “Stop trying to butter me up. You know I’m spoken for,” she raises her left hand up and waves her fingers, a large diamond shining under the fluorescents, “And now it’s official.”

Kirsch laughs, “Holy shit!” He puts the take-out down on the counter and jogs around to go behind the desk and scoop her up in a hug, “Congratulations!”

She laughs as he squeezes and lifts her half an inch off the floor, “Put me down, you overgrown child.”

He sets her down and laughs, “Sorry, I’m just really happy for you.”

“Thank you, dear. But you,” she shakes her head and swats him out from in front of her, “Need to be on the visitor side of the desk. You know the rules.”

He cuts the corner and frowns, “Come on, I’m basically staff at this point.”

“Being the son of one of the best nurses in this place does not make you basically staff,” she pauses to scan some charts, “Speaking of, I’m assuming you’re here to see her?”

He nods, “Yup - wouldn’t happen to know her rounds right now, would you? I couldn’t catch her on her cell.”

“Yeah, I saw her about twenty minutes ago, actually. A bunch of girls from your grade came in here and she’s helping them out.”

He stills, “Wait, are you sure? Like, they go to Silas?”

She nods, “Mhm. I know one of them, actually. Neighbour of mine.”

“How do you know their names?”

She shrugs, “I only know Maya. The others I’ve never seen before.”

“Okay, but,” he drums his fingers on the counter, “Was there this totally tall chick with them? Like, tall as me - red hair? Kinda hot?”
She nods, “Yeah I’m pretty sure there was a girl like that.”

“Right, um, fuck,” he steps back and backs up, “I’ve gotta go talk to them.”

He starts to bolt down the hall when she calls out to him. He turns to her and she’s pointing at the take-out container, “Was this for me or were you going to bring this to your mom?”

He jogs back and grabs the take-out container, offering her a small smile before bolting back towards the triage rooms.

“*Kirsch!*”

He turns quickly, almost running into two doctors rushing down the hall, “What?”

“They’ll be in Hall C. Room 307.”

He nods quickly, “Right, yeah.” He’s running down the hall and throws a *thanks, Jackie!* over his shoulder.

He cuts through Hall B because he knows a shortcut. He counts the doors and sees that he’s not that far off from 307.

(It doesn’t stop him from picking up the pace of his jog a little bit.)

He finally gets to the door and bursts through it, “Is she hurt?”

He tries to catch his breath as he’s faced with four confused women. Kirsch’s mom looks up from the leg she’s treating and frowns, “Baby, what are you doing here?”

“*Mom,*” his face warms up, “*Don’t call me that here.*”

Danny and Maya grin. Rachel looks like she’s trying not to pass out. Kirsch’s mom smiles at him before going back to cleaning up the cut on Rachel’s leg, “Well?”

“I, uh, I was bringing you some lunch.” She looks back at him and he holds up the container.

“That’s very sweet of you, honey,” she wipes at the cut, “But she’s okay, by the way.”

“What?”

“You came in here like a bat out of Hell asking if she was hurt,” she quirks an eyebrow and looks at him, “You were talking about Rachel, right?”

He stares at Danny for a few seconds before looking back at his mom and nodding, “Yeah, no, of course. Jackie told me you were in here with some Silas girls, so.”

She hums to herself and looks like she’s trying to hold her tongue about something. He’s seen that face enough times to know that it can’t mean anything good for him. His palms start to sweat.

(He can feel Danny staring at him but he refuses to look anywhere else but his mom.)

“Sweetie, I’m not going to be able to stop for lunch any time soon. We’re short three people so I’m probably going to be working overtime today.”

Kirsch deflates. His mom ends up working overtime almost every time she goes into work. She deserves a break every once in a while. Really, she deserves the world.
(Maybe he can cut back on his driving in the next little while.)

“Are you sure? I made sure to make your favourite.”

Maya lets out a soft aw and Danny offers him a genuine smile, saying softly, “That’s really sweet of you.”

He feels his lips start to lift and can see his mom look between them. She has a sparkle in her eye that he doesn’t entirely trust. She looks to him, “Why don’t you just take that lunch to the cafeteria and finish it yourself? I wouldn’t want it to go to waste,” she turns to the girls, “Danny, dear, you can join him - he always makes way too much. Maya is clearly already on hand-holding duty,” she gestures to the death grip Rachel currently has around Maya’s hand, “And she came in here with a sandwich so I’m sure she wouldn’t mind.”

“Um, no, I couldn’t leave-”

“Do you mind, Maya?”

“Mom, I really don’t think-”

Maya shrugs, “I don’t care. I’m honestly full from before. Dan, you can go if you want.”

Danny shakes her head, “Seriously, I don’t really need-”

“Perfect!” Kirsch’s mom looks to him and smiles, “I’ll see you at home later?”

He goes to opens his mouth to protest but just ends up sighing, “Yeah, I’ll make some extra dinner, don’t worry about picking anything up.”

She beams at him, “You’re an angel.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he steps back and gestures towards the door, looking at Danny, “Uh, after you I guess.”

Danny smiles awkwardly and walks out the door. Kirsch is about to follow her when he hears, “Um, excuse me?”

He turns around and his mom is looking at him expectantly. He furrows his brow, “What?”

“You came all the way here to see your mother and you’re not even going to give her a kiss?”

He groans, “Mom.”

“Don’t Mom me, Kirsch.”

He lets out an exaggerated sigh and walks over, bending down to give her a kiss on the cheek. She looks genuinely happy so he whispers a hushed love you before leaving. He’s halfway out the door when she yells I love you, too! back at him.

Danny seems to find it funny enough because she won’t stop laughing all the way to the cafeteria.

When they find a seat he sets the container down, “Um, I’ll go grab us some plates and stuff.” She nods and as an afterthought he adds, “Fork or chopsticks for you? I don’t know if they have any, but in case they do.”

She looks taken aback and after a second she says, “Chopsticks are cool - if they have them.”
He nods and walks over to the utensil station. They’re there, so he picks up a few pairs of chopsticks along with some plates and napkins.

He walks back over to the table and sets them down in front of their seats. He tries not to fumble with the container, but it’s hard when he can see out of his peripheral that Danny is staring at him.

He uses the chopsticks to scoop some noodles onto Danny’s plate but at the sight of her smile he ends up dumping a few onto the table. He makes a face, “Oops. That can be mine, don’t worry about it.”

She shrugs and reaches forward, plucking the noodles off the table and throwing them in her mouth. He raises his eyebrow at her and she shrugs, "What? Five second rule."

He smiles to himself and throws the rest of the noodles onto his place, "So what happened with Rachel?"

Danny picks up her chopsticks and tries to break them apart, "She fell during practice. She couldn't put any pressure on her foot so we decided to bring her here just in case she needed an X-Ray."

Kirsch takes a huge scoop of noodles into his mouth and remembers Danny's last meet. He imagines her tumbling across the track and feels his stomach turn, "You girls warm up and stretch before you run, right?"

She rolls her eyes, "Of course we do."

"I'm just saying, you know, you gotta be careful and stuff."

"Kirsch, we're running track - not in fight club. We're responsible with our training; Rachel just had a bad fall," she shrugs and tries to pick up some noodles but they fall, "It happens."

“I guess.”

"It's not like football is so safe.” Her face softens, “Speaking of,” she gestures towards his hand, "How's that healing?"

He grins and waves chopsticks around, snapping them together, "Good enough that I can do this," he uses them to point at her struggling to pick up her noodles, "Which is more than I can say about you."

She scowls, "Shut up."

He laughs, "If you can't use chopsticks why did you ask for them?"

Her cheeks pink, "I figured you can use them, so it can't be that hard."

"Looks like that logic is working out great for you," he rolls his eyes and puts his chopsticks down. He reaches forward and grabs her hand, adjusting her fingers to properly hold them. He tilts his head and squints, grabbing his chopsticks again and holding them to compare. He looks up at her with a sheepish smile, "Sorry, it's, uh, kinda hard to figure it out at this angle. So, yeah, just kinda rest it like that and try to grab the noodles."

Danny reaches down and tries to grab some but they fall between the sticks. She lets out a frustrated groan.

"No, no - you gotta," he adjusts the sticks slightly, "Yeah, pinch them like that."
“I got it, Kirsch.”

“Right. That’s why you’ve taken exactly zero successful bites so far.”

“I really hate you.”

“Just try again, you asshole.”

She tries again and this time is able to grab a large bunch of noodles and successfully bring them to her mouth. She looks at him with an excited grin, "Holy shit - I did it!"

She says it around a mouth full of noodles and a few hang off the side of her lips, but it's actually kind of cute.

(Like, for Danny. Or whatever.)

He laughs and shakes his head, scooping another mouthful, “You’re gonna be a pro or something, soon. Maybe you can enter eating competitions.”

It makes her laugh and she coughs a bit on the noodles in her throat. He slides off his chair and grabs her some water from the dispenser near the utensils. He jogs back and sets it in front of her, “Here, drink this.”

She takes a few sips between coughs and smiles around the glass when it dies down, “Thanks.” She smiles wider as she continues to scoop more noodles in her mouth, “My family doesn’t eat a lot of Chinese food, so I’ve never really had a chance to use these.”

His eyes widen, “What? So you’ve never been to Shu Shu’s?”

She shakes her head, “I’ve never even heard of it.”

He drops his chopsticks, “Bro, that’s - wow, that’s such a shame.” He leans forward, “And, like, it’s not even that far from here! It’s maybe about a twenty minute drive.”

She laughs, “Kirsch, I’m not taking what’s probably going to be an hour long bus ride just to check out a restaurant that I’ve never even been to.”

He shrugs and waves his chopstick at her, “I could just take you sometime.”

She stills and looks down, moving some of the food around on her plate, “Um-”

His neck burns and he twirls some noodles in his place, bringing his other hand up to pick at the edge of the plate, “I mean, or I could just give you the address or something and you can check it out whenever.”

“Yeah, of course,” she picks at a few more noodles, “But, we do probably have some Zeta and Summer Soc stuff coming up, so, you know.”

He looks up at her, “Yeah! Like, lots of planning and stuff.”

She nods, “Definitely. So - might as well eat, too, right?”

“Yeah,” he smiles, “Right.”

“Okay, well. Whenever, then.”
He grabs a bunch of noodles that are three-times the size of a normal bite just so he can have something to chew on to hide his grin.

There’s a few seconds of silence until, “This tastes horrible, by the way.”

He laughs and picks up a piece of chicken, flinging it at her, “Fuck off, Danny.”

She laughs and picks the chicken off of her shirt, popping it into her mouth.

(He’s going to make sure to cook something extra special for his mom tonight. Maybe he kind of owes her.)

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LaF (5:02pm): hey. are you free today? i’m kinda bored

JP (5:04pm): i’ve got a controller and a bag of chips with your name on it

LaF (5:09pm): i’ll be there in 15

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“Okay, say something for me.” She turns in her computer chair and points the camera in Carmilla’s direction.

Carmilla sticks up her middle finger and Laura rolls her eyes, “Carm, seriously. Give me a line.”

“I hate being filmed. How does that work for a line?”

“That’s a terrible line. Try again.”

“Louis Tomlinson is a terrible singer.”

Laura puts the camera down and looks at Carmilla in shock, “That is a horrible joke to make. Take it back.”

Carmilla grins into her book and shrugs, “What? It’s the truth.”

“That’s not,” She shakes her head, “Carmilla, it’s my birthday and you have to do what I say. So take it back.”

“Wow, I’ve never heard of that rule before - is it new?”

“It’s basically law in this house, so.”

Carmilla sinks further into the pillow and flips her page, “Guess I missed the memo when Papa Hollis went over the house rules.”

Laura giggles but then straightens up and brings the camera back in front of her, “Okay, come on. I wanna test this out so you’re going to be my model.”

“I think models are for photos, cupcake.”

“Fine, you’ll be my subject, my actor - whatever.” She presses record, “Okay, it’s filming. Say something.”
“Laura,” Carmilla tries to hide herself from behind her book, “I really do hate being filmed. It’s your passion, not mine.”

“Yeah, yeah - that’s great. Keep pouring your deepest secrets to me. This is gold.”

Carmilla bites her lips and laughs, “I didn’t get this so you could film me. I got it so you could do video blogs or documentaries or report on some other crap you’re interested in.”

“Maybe I’m interested in you.”

Carmilla lowers her book and stares at her in the way that usually sends a swoop in her chest, “That makes two of us.”

Laura pauses and Carmilla closes her book completely, never breaking eye contact. Laura starts to feel dizzy and laughs it off, “Of course you’d be interested in yourself, you egomaniac.”

Something shifts in Carmilla’s expression and she lets out a deep sigh, picking up her book and pushing herself further into the bed, “Of course.”

“What?”

“Nevermind.”

She steadies the camera, “You’re being grumpy again.” Laura smiles to herself, trying her best Australian accent, “And as you can see here, we have a rare sighting of the broody teenager in her natural habitat.”

Carmilla groans, “Oh God, Laura, please stop.”

“Oh! She speaks,” Laura gets off the chair and approaches the bed, dropping her voice to a whisper, “We must be careful not to disturb her while she continues her typical activities of reading, general disdain and apathetic disposition.”

“I’m going to throw this book soon.”

“Ah! She seems to be hostile,” Laura circles the bed, “We must show the utmost care so that she does not attack.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes but Laura can see the hint of a smile on her lips. She crawls onto the bed and sits on her knees in front of Carmilla, zooming in on her face, “The real question is: will the broody teenager actually act on her anger?”

“Do you really want to find out?”

Laura brings the camera close to Carmilla’s face, “The creature makes threats but don’t worry, gentle audience - they’re all empty.”

Carmilla makes a face at her before throwing her book down and reaching forward to grab the camera. Laura giggles, “Carm, stop!” Carmilla is laughing and continues to reach for it, trying to hold Laura’s other arm for leverage. Laura manages to hold it high, “You’re going to break it before I’ve even had it for a day!”

“Should have thought about that before you decided to venture into a career in National Geographic.”

Laura feels her side hurt from laughing so much. Carmilla launches at her and she’s able to duck to
the side and place her camera on the floor. Carmilla is still reaching for her and brushes against her ribs, a particularly ticklish spot for her. She jolts and yelps, Carmilla’s mouth twisting into a wicked grin.

Carmilla shifts so she’s straddling her, “I never knew you were ticklish.”

Laura tries to remain stoic, “I’m not. Please check your sources because they’re lying to you.”

Carmilla nods and shrugs, “Got it. So if I do this,” she hovers her hand over Laura’s ribs, “Nothing will happen?”

Laura tenses and can feel the laughter bubbling inside at the suspense of Carmilla’s hand, “Nope.”

“Alright,” Carmilla pulls her hand back and Laura blows out a breath of relief before Carmilla suddenly reaches forward and starts tickling Laura’s ribs. Laura squirms and a laugh rips through her throat, “Carm! Carm, please!”

Carmilla’s laugh echoes throughout the room as she continues to poke at Laura’s sides. Laura jolts so hard that it knocks Carmilla off-balance and she uses this opportunity to roll them over. She reaches up and pins Carmilla’s arms with both of her hands. The laughing immediately stops and they’re both staring at each other, their chests heaving as they try to catch their breath.

Carmilla keeps looking at Laura’s lips and she’s suddenly feeling self-conscious.

(Are they chapped? Is she wearing a weird lip gloss?)

There’s a tight knot twisting in her gut and she shifts a bit to try and alleviate it. Carmilla sucks in a breath and makes a face, Laura’s eyes immediately widening, “Am I causing you pain?”

“Define pain.”

She says it in a tone that Laura can’t quite put her finger on but she’s quick to smile, “You’re not hurting me, don’t worry. Maybe just my ego. You’re way stronger than you look.”

“I am skilled in the art of Krav Maga.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“I’m a warrior.”

Carmilla snorts, “You’d like to think so.”

Carmilla moves to get out of the pin but Laura holds her ground. Laura raises her eyebrow, “Would you like to retract that statement, cutie?”

Carmilla scowls and tightens her lips before thrusting forward so that they’re sitting up. Laura lets go of Carmilla’s wrists and braces herself on Carmilla’s shoulders, letting out a breathy laugh of surprise.

“I stand by my statement.”

Laura rolls her eyes, “I’m the one who’s still on top. I’m winning.”

“I wasn’t aware that this became a competition.”

“Carmilla everything is a competition.”
Carmilla grins, “Oh, really?” She leans forward, “‘Cause I thought you were all about women supporting each other.”

Laura’s heart is in her throat and she wishes they weren’t so close because she can feel the heat radiating off of her cheeks; she’s sure they’re flaming red.

“I am.”

They’re somehow closer.

“Doesn’t really look that way if you’re all about us being pitted against each other, sweetheart.”

Her mouth is dry and no matter how many times she licks her lips it seems to do nothing. The knots in her stomach are twisting more than she likes and she feels way too big under Carmilla’s stare. She’s dizzy and feels like she’s being hypnotized and-

“Laura! Are you kids coming down for dinner?”

Laura gulps and jolts back, looking at the closed door before looking back at Carmilla.

“We’ll be down in a minute!”

She feels embarrassment wash over herself, “I should, uh, you know.” Laura gestures towards herself with some sort of signal of moving off Carmilla’s lap.

Carmilla leans back on her hands and shrugs, a small smile on her lips, “I have a pretty girl in my lap. I’m not really going to complain.”

Laura blushes harder - if it’s possible - as she awkwardly rolls off. She lets out an uneasy laugh, “Yeah, duh.” She pauses, “Not that I’m saying I’m pretty but, like, I get what you mean.” Her eyes widen, “Not that I want pretty girls in my lap, but - you get what I’m saying.”

(What is wrong with her?)

Carmilla looks at her fondly, “Cupcake, please don’t hurt yourself.”

Laura rolls her eyes and gets off the bed, stretching slightly, “Um, I’m just gonna go to the washroom quickly before dinner. I’ll meet you downstairs?”

Carmilla nods, “Yeah, sure. Mark gets nervous when I try adding spices to his dishes so I’ll see if I can add a few things before we eat.”

Laura offers her a smile before Carmilla is off and down the stairs. Laura presses her back against the door and closes her eyes, blowing out a deep breath.

(One thing is for sure: no more homemade documentaries for a very long time.)

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LaFontaine scowls at the screen as their player is shot to the ground. They wait for someone to revive them but no one runs to their place. JP continues to attack his target and they gesture to the screen, “Um, are you going to revive me or not?”

“Come on, I’m about to take half this team down from this position. You’ll respawn in a minute.”

“Yeah, but then I’m going to lose all of my guns.”
“Dude, it’s not worth it.”

They scoff and drop their controller on the ground, sinking against the side of the bed as they wait for their respawn time to finish.

*It’s not worth it* - God, how hard is it to count on people these days?

Well, apparently it’s pretty hard; it’s just too much to expect someone to be reliable anymore. Which seems to be the running theme of their life lately. Since apparently the girl they want to spend their life with is just making huge decisions without talking to them about it. Decisions that probably involve schools that are too far or too hard to get into or are too expensive. Which is completely *fine* because it’s not like they’ve discussed their future and their plans and their school choices together. It’s not like they made pro and con lists of different programs or talked about student housing. It’s not like they’ve been talking about this since they were kids.

But, whatever, it’s *fine*.

(It’s fine. It’s fine. It’s *fine*.)

“Dude, are you gonna play or let yourself die again?”

LaFontaine snatches the controller off the ground, “Yeah, no thanks to you.”

JP turns to them and raises his eyebrows, “Woah. What the hell.”

They shake their head, mashing their fingers against the controller, “Nevermind, sorry. Just drop it.”

JP shrugs and looks back at the TV, “Whatever you say.”

The room is quiet except for the sounds of gunshots and screams and explosions. LaF feels an uneasy twist in their gut. They sigh, “I’m just stressed about school.”

“School? That’s it?”

(They wish.)

“Yeah, I’m just - I know it’s stupid but I’ve got so much coming up and now I’m randomly stressing about college and,” they run a hand over their face, “Do you ever just wish you could pause life? Just stop it for like, maybe even just a few hours?”

JP pauses the game and turns to them, nodding, “All the time. I, uh, don’t really play sports or anything, and my parents don’t have that much saved for my schooling. So my only chance at getting into a decent school is through a scholarship. I just really need to keep up my grades now so that in Senior year I can keep up my academic classes and hopefully get one.”

They blow out a breath and rub at their eyes, “Fuck. Why is this so stressful?”

(Maybe because Perry is supposed to be their one constant and suddenly she’s making plans without them.)

“Cause life is shitty.”

They run a mental list of all the things due this week and shake their head, “This week alone I have three assignments and a huge essay.”

“Here,” JP stretches across the floor and opens his bottom drawer of his dresses. He rummages for a
second before pulling out a mint container. He throws it up at them and LaFontaine catches it while he crawls back over.

“I know we’re cool and all, but if you think my breath stinks you can just tell me without being a dick about it.”

JP rolls his eyes, “It’s adderall. I keep them in there in case my mom snoops around.” They look up at him with a hesitant look and he waves his hand, “Honestly, there’s only two or three in there. You can leave them if you want - just, if you’re having a stressful week then feel free to pocket it. I’ll probably get more in a few weeks when stuff picks up again so I don’t mind.”

LaF rolls the container in their hand, “I don’t know.”

JP nods, “Alright, that’s cool. You can just leave it on the dresser before you leave.”

They grab the controller and shake their head, “Okay, let’s just shoot as many people as we can until we forget money and school is even a thing.”

JP laughs, “Deal.”

They hang around for another hour before the nagging thought of all those assignments becomes too much and they decide to head home. They pick up the container and pass the dresser on the way out, deciding to pocket it last minute.

(Just in case. Like JP said, no big deal.)

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Finding Nemo ends and Carmilla reaches for her phone, “I should get going - it’s kind of late.”

Laura’s stomach twists, “Oh? Is it?”

“Yes,” Carmilla shifts the laptop so it’s no longer on their laps and she stretches as she stands up, “And I don’t want your dad to offer me a ride again because he feels bad about me walking home in the dark.”

Laura fiddles with the sheets on her bed, “That’s actually a good point. It’s super dark and who knows who is out there wandering the streets. You should just stay the night again.”

“That’s two nights in a row - I don’t wanna be a bother.”

Laura isn’t really sure why it would be a bother. Carmilla has spent the night multiple times in one week before. Just because it’s two in a row shouldn’t make a difference. She quickly shakes her head, “What? No. You wouldn’t be at all. You can stay here as long as you want, really.”

Carmilla tilts her head and visibly deflates, “Laura…” she trails off and sighs, “This isn’t a solution.”

“I’m not trying to solve anything.”

Carmilla smiles - it’s the sad one Laura’s gotten used to that makes her heart feel heavy - and steps forward to sit on the edge of the bed, “I’ll be okay.”

“Yeah, but,” Laura reaches forward to play with Carmilla’s fingers, “What if you’re not?” Carmilla avoids her gaze, “Plus, we have the day off tomorrow - we could do something fun! And it’s still my birthday, so think of it as my last request.”
Laura attempts a smile and Carmilla rolls her eyes, “I’ll go get changed.”

Carmilla grabs her sleep clothes and steps into Laura’s bathroom, closing the door behind her. Laura lies back on her bed and lets out a tiny noise of excitement before bouncing up and quickly changing. When Carmilla is done, she walks out to grab her toothbrush - Laura bought her a spare - and Laura joins her at the sink. They fall into an unspoken competition and Laura tries to brush as quickly as she can. It’s all for nothing because Carmilla is already rinsed and spitting out her toothpaste, sticking her tongue out at Laura in the mirror when she’s done. Laura finishes and turns, the sight of her making her giggle.

Carmilla frowns, “What?”

“You, um,” she giggles again before reaching up and slowly wiping a small spot of toothpaste from the corner of Carmilla’s lips. “There,” her thumb lingers for half a second before she pulls back, “Your lips are so soft.”

“I’ve been told, cutie,” she grins smugly, “Multiple times.”

Laura can feel her cheeks warm at the sudden imagine of Carmilla kissing other girls. Its hard to imagine because she’s never actually seen Carmilla kiss anyone before - and while she’s on the subject she kind of wonders what a kiss from Carmilla would actually feel like. She’s felt her lips on her cheeks and they felt soft enough, but what would it feel like on her lips? Her friends always talk about girls’ lips being softer but is it really true?

(Sh’e’ll have to ask Carmilla about it on another day.)

Laura scratches at the back of her neck, “Yeah, I, uh - I bet,” she steps backwards and collides with the wall, “Oh God. Sorry, uh, yeah - let’s go to bed.”

Her cheeks are on fire and Carmilla is staring at her like she’s using all of her willpower not to laugh.

They crawl into bed and Laura opts to keep her tardis light off.

(Maybe she’ll be able to get to go to bed faster and sleep off this weird feeling in her chest.)

Carmilla turns on her side and Laura hesitates before scooting closer and wrapping her arm around Carmilla again. She feels Carmilla tense and Laura freezes, unsure if she should pull back. Her heart is beating hard against her chest and she almost moves to just turn in the other direction before she feels Carmilla shift so that they’re facing. Carmilla moves so that she’s half on top of Laura, arm tucked around her waist and face nuzzled into her neck. Their legs intertwine and Laura smiles as she wraps her arms around Carmilla’s shoulder to hold her.

“Did you have a good birthday?”

Laura closes her eyes, Carmilla’s smile at the forefront of her mind.

“The best one yet.”

(With Carmilla held in her arms, there’s no way she could be lying.)

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Care Perr [4 Missed Calls]

Care Perr (11:02pm): Hey sweetie. I missed you a lot today. I think you’re mad, but I’d like to talk
LaFontaine rubs a hand over their face and blows out a breath. Even though their pocket is one pill lighter, the weight of the container is overwhelming.

(It feels like an anchor in a sea of problems they’ll never be able to avoid.)

They type out a quick message.

My Person <3 (11:07pm): I love you, too. So much. You’re fine, I know things are okay between us. xo

Perry has so much going on that she doesn’t deserve to put up with the crap they’re dealing with. They tap their phone and consider adding something else, typing before they change their mind.

My Person <3 (11:09pm): And sorry for today.

(At this point, they don’t even know which part they’re apologizing for.)

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The sun shines into her room and Laura squints at the brightness. She goes to move but there is a dead weight sprawled on top of her. She looks down and smiles; Carmilla’s hair is a mess and her lips are slightly parted.

(This is the most beautiful she has ever seen her.)

She scratches softly up Carmilla’s back, “Carm, wake up.”

Carmilla shifts and shakes her head, “No, I don’t want to wake up for another six hours.”

Usually Laura would laugh at something like this, but Carmilla is still pressed against her chest and every word causes a brush of lips against her skin. She’s suddenly very aware of their proximity and wills herself to take a calm breath. It feels like her heart is trying to pound its way out of her chest and she hopes Carmilla doesn’t notice.

“Our heart is beating so fast.”


Her laugh is fake and nervous, “No it’s not.”

Carmilla smiles up at her and shifts so that she’s more hovering on top of her body. Laura feels a deep tug in the bottom of her stomach. She shifts her hips a little bit and glances down at Carmilla’s lips for a second.

“Like what you see?”

Laura looks up immediately and can feel her cheeks warming. Carmilla is smiling at her softly and she knows she’s joking around but Laura can’t help but reach up and still tuck some stray hairs behind her ear.

“I always like what I see.”

Carmilla looks down and bites her lip, a shyness washing over her face. It warms Laura’s chest and the tug in her stomach pulls harder.
She moves slightly and it causes Carmilla to shift into her, their hips meeting. They both take in a short breath and now that tug feels more like an ache.

Carmilla looks down at her and licks her lips, the lips Laura can’t stop looking at no matter how hard she tries.

“Laura.”

Her heart is beating so loud that she can hear it in her ears, “Let me think for a second.”

Carmilla stares at her and it’s the small way she furrows her brows in concern that sparks Laura to just close her eyes before leaning up to press forward.

Carmilla melts into her and Laura finally understands how soft those lips really are.

(They’re so, so soft. Softer than she could have ever imagined.)

It starts out slow but Carmilla pinches her hip and Laura can’t stop herself from shifting her hip up and rolling them over. She frantically moves her lips to Carmilla’s jaw, trailing kisses down to the base of her neck. They both let out a small noise from the back of their throats when Carmilla shifts her hips up a few times and they brush in short bursts of contact.

Carmilla moves her hands up and slips them under Laura’s t-shirt, running her nails lightly up and down Laura’s back. Laura closes her eyes and sucks on the hollow of Carmilla’s collarbone, “That feels really good.”

“Yeah?” Carmilla breath hitches as Laura continues to suck along her skin, “You’re not doing so bad, yourself.”

Laura moves up and gives Carmilla a deep kiss before pulling back, “Really? I’m not - you know, doing something wrong or something?”

Carmilla smiles in the kind way that makes Laura’s heart flutter. She reaches up and cups Laura’s cheek; Laura leans in to the touch. “You’re doing great.”

Laura nods. Her cheeks are hot and her stomach is still in knots, “Okay. Right, okay.”

Carmilla bites her lip and lets out a laugh, leaning up and giving Laura a soft kiss. She shifts up so that she’s sitting, Laura adjusting so that she can sit comfortably in her lap.

Laura relaxes into the kisses, feeling incredibly lucky to have someone like Carmilla who understands that she’s feeling a bit nervous. She feels slightly more comfortable in this position, her arms wrapped around Carmilla’s neck and Carmilla’s hands still scratching up her back.

(That really does feel good.)

Carmilla takes her time kissing her. Nothing about this seems rushed or fake - it’s real; it feels so real. Laura keeps giggling because she’s smiling into the kisses and Carmilla scoffs playfully at her; Laura can’t find it in her to care because she is just so happy.

Carmilla leans back and places soft kisses down her jaw. She runs her teeth along Laura’s neck, replacing her teeth with her tongue and lightly sucking right above Laura’s collarbone.

Laura takes in a ragged breath as Carmilla trails her hands to her torso, pressing patterns along her stomach and ribs. Laura moves her hips in a slow rhythm, Carmilla smiling into her neck at Laura’s
small noises of frustration when she doesn’t get the kind of friction she wants. Carmilla’s fingers trail down to the waist of Laura’s pyjama pants and she pulls back to look at Laura for confirmation.

Laura nods as quickly as she can - she thinks a loud for the love of God, hurry up would be a bit too eager - and Carmilla smiles wide at her.

(Wow, she’s stunning.)

Carmilla brings a hand up to cup Laura’s cheek and pull her forward to give her a gentle kiss as her other hand continues to drag lower, moving under the band of her underwear. This is probably the most turned on Laura has ever felt in her entire life and she doesn’t want to admit that she is embarrassingly close enough to finishing when-

“Laura, are you going to prepare the agenda for this week’s GSA meeting?”

Laura rips herself from Carmilla and looks up at Perry standing in the doorway of her bathroom.

“Um, yeah, no I am. I did, actually. It’s printed out on the computer desk.”

Perry smiles and nods, “That’s perfect. Did you print enough copies?”

“Yup, I think I did around twenty?”

Perry claps, “That’s perfect! Make sure to bring some cat food, too.”

“Um, sure,” she looks down and Carmilla is already back to sleep. She looks back at Perry, “Why am I doing that again?”

“Because of the cat adoption, obviously.”

She nods, “Right. Of course.”

Laura looks down at Carmilla before glancing back at Perry, but she isn’t there anymore.

Okay, that’s weird. Really weird.

(Wait, is this a-)

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Laura’s eyes shoot open. Sometime in the night they shifted so that Carmilla turned away from her, Laura’s arms still wrapped around her waist. Laura stares with bulged eyes at the back of Carmilla’s head and she has never been more grateful that she doesn’t have to stare at those piercing eyes or messy hair or soft lips.

The soft lips that she was just kissing.

In a dream. It was in a dream, so - that’s okay. She thinks.

(She hopes.)

She gently removes her arms as slowly as possible, mumbling please don’t wake up, please don’t wake up, please don’t wake up under her breath. After she’s successfully detached herself she rolls out of bed. Laura stares at the girl in her bed and starts to pace. This is wrong. This is - some sort of violation. Right? Yes. Or maybe not. She isn’t sure.
(She isn’t sure about anything right now.)

She’s starting to feel a bit light-headed and dizzy from the pacing so she stops, again unable to stop staring at Carmilla. Laura eyes her phone on the nightstand and quickly grabs it, almost running into the bathroom and locking the door shut.

She slides down the wall beside the bathtub and runs a shaky hand through her hair. She unlocks it and opens a new browser tab.

(She prays to God that Yahoo! Answers has an explanation for this.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.

Fool's Gold updates every Tuesday & Thursday, 5-6PM EST
She reads at least fifteen different forums — and Laura really has to remember to delete her search history, because she and Carmilla do have the same exact phone, and she really doesn’t need her to pick up the wrong phone one day and find nine variations of the search ‘I had a dream about kissing my best friend’. She closes the last tab on her phone and sinks back against the wall. Nothing she’s been reading feels right, nothing really explains her experience. For one, Carmilla’s a girl. So that makes things a little bit more complicated. Like, really complicated, actually. And it was more than just a kissing dream, she can admit that. She’s had kissing dreams before about her friends. She used to dream about kissing Kirsch in middle school.

Except that’s a lot less complicated. Obviously.

There was that one dream in freshman year, when she’d just met Danny for the first time. She was tall and athletic and brilliant and passionate about all the right things. Laura had admired the crap out of her. It hadn’t really come as a surprise when she’d dreamt of kissing her in the library, it was just a dream. She’d had loads of them before. She didn’t want to kiss Danny, she just wanted to be Danny.

But she’s not sure that’s a valid excuse here. This was a little more than that. A lot more than that. Her dream was definitely going down a not PG-13 path, and she can’t really ignore the ache between her legs.

(Which isn’t her fault and it really isn’t objectifying Carmilla, either. It’s like, basic biology.)

The fact that she isn’t attracted to Carmilla doesn’t change the fact that she was thinking of — no, *dreaming* of sex. Which is completely out of her control, and in the dream it was consensual, so she decides not to let herself feel too guilty about kind of enjoying it.

In the dream.

Not in reality.

It’s natural for her body to respond to those kinds of thoughts.

Yahoo! Answers is no help whatsoever, and she briefly considers bringing it up to Carmilla, but dismisses the thought before she can fully imagine it. Laura leaves her phone on the edge of the
bathtub and slips back into her room.

Carmilla is still asleep on the bed, her arms wrapped around Laura’s yellow pillow. Her hair is a mess and her lips are slightly parted, exactly as they were in the dream.

And Laura needs to like, not think about that at all right now.

She unplugs her laptop and takes it with her back into the bathroom. Maybe she needs to try another approach. It takes a few minutes for it to start up, and then she’s clicking open a tab in Google Chrome. She clicks on one of her bookmarks and starts typing under the Ask a question box.

Sex dream about my best friend — Please explain!!

—

JP (10:15am): feeling better today?

LaF (10:16am): what do you mean?

JP (10:18am): you were kinda off yesterday.

JP (10:18am): its the school stuff right? i totally get it, ive got like two tests this week

LaF (10:26am): yeah just school stuff

LaF (10:26am): im feeling a little better about it now

JP (10:28am): cool

They’ve been doing some thinking. LaFontaine has a lot in common with JP — strict parents, stuff to hide, something to get them through the day. JP doesn’t have a secret relationship, but LaFontaine has never considered Perry to be a source of stress in their life. Perry shouldn’t be causing them stress, and if she does, that means they’re fucking things up again.

So, yeah. They’ve been doing some thinking. JP definitely has everything under control when it comes to the occasional pick-me-ups.

(Occasional being the operative word.)

If sophomore year was any indication, they don’t exactly have a good track record with self-control, but people change. People grow.

And they’re running out of ways to keep their head above water.

Maybe it’s a stretch, but then again, maybe it isn’t. Their phone buzzes again in their pocket, but it’s not JP.

Care Perr (10:30am): I’m staying at my Dad’s tonight. Do you want to spend the night?

They smile — LaFontaine could easily convince their parents to let them go. It’s a school night, and Perry’s Dad’s house is at least half an hour closer to Silas High than their house is. They plan out their pitch — something to do with saving on gas money — as they type out a reply.

My Person <3 (10:30am): don’t i always?
**My Person <3 (10:30am):** want me to grab a pizza on my way?

They reach across the bed for their jacket, searching through the pockets for the mint container. It’s empty now, they know that. But they toss it onto their nightstand anyway, just in case they forget later. Perry and the pills aren’t a combination they’d like to bring together. LaFontaine can keep their crutches separate.

**Care Perr (10:32am):** I was thinking we could make quesadillas tonight

LaFontaine feels their stomach growl at the thought. Perry’s quesadillas are like, an all new level of incredible.

**My Person <3 (10:32am):** marry me.

**Care Perr (10:33am):** That’s the plan <3

—

She keeps thinking about kissing her. Which still isn’t really a violation of anything because she doesn’t want to kiss the real Carmilla. But kissing Dream Carmilla was nice and okay — it’s not that she doesn’t want to kiss the real Carmilla, because she wouldn’t be totally against it. But kissing Dream Carmilla was less confusing, even if it did end up bringing up all these questions.

Would she like kissing Carmilla? Would she like kissing another girl? Would she like kissing anybody? Is there anybody she wants to kiss?

(She feels like these are questions that she should have considered before.)

Does she like Carmilla? That’s probably a stretch. She’s overthinking again. Kissing Dream Carmilla was nothing like this. Everything made sense for just a moment. Now, she’s a mess.

Laura lets herself wonder what the real thing would be like. She could lean over right now. They have maybe two feet between them on the couch, and her Dad is at work, so no awkward conversations or timely interruptions. She could close this distance — put a hand on Carmilla’s knee or maybe in her hair — she likes that idea — and see if she’s as good of a kisser as she dreamed.

But it feels a little daunting and all too real when she remembers what that would mean to Carmilla. This sort of thing has to be different when you’re already attracted to women. Laura can’t really see things from that perspective, even if she feels like maybe she could. One day.

If she does anything out of the ordinary, it would probably confuse Carmilla, or worst case scenario: freak her out. Just because she’s thinking about it doesn’t mean that Carm is, too. And there’s no good way to explain that it’s about curiosity, not romance or attraction.

(She thinks.

No. No, she knows. It’s just curiosity, and whatever lingering feeling the dream left her with.)

Carmilla looks away from the TV and glances towards her, raising her eyebrows.

“*You good there, sunshine?”*

“*Huh?”* She’s staring. “*Oh, yeah, totally.*” Laura shifts in her seat and pulls her computer up into her lap. Carmilla relaxes again and goes back to watching television, just as Laura pulls up the tab that she’s been checking religiously since 7am.
Since nothing had been even remotely helpful to her online, Laura had posed her own question to the internet, and then promptly gone to take a shower because nobody is on Yahoo! at 2am, and she really needed one to calm down a little.

Underneath the detailed description of hers and Carmilla’s friendship — she wanted to make the question as accurate as possible, after all — Laura has four new responses.

**FullHannah19: hi honey!! it sounds like you might be gay or bisexual. i’m a lesbian and this sort of thing happened to me all the time with my best friends before i came out. maybe you should ask yourself if you find girls more attractive than boys?**

She furrows her eyebrows, that still seems kind of... unlikely. She should know if she’s gay. Laura’s always been straight, it’s not like that kind of thing just changes all of a sudden. And as for women versus men, that’s not really a fair comparison. Women’s physical appearances are held to a higher standard in society, everyone knows that women are prettier.

**Jason591: is she hot?**

Yes, but that’s not the point.

Not to mention Carmilla’s physical appearance shouldn’t be her only defining quality, there’s like, a billion other great things about her.

**adrn444: It's actually super common for people to have dreams like this. It doesn't necessarily mean you are sexually attracted to her, merely that you really care about her.**

That actually makes a lot of sense. Of course she cares about Carmilla — now more than ever.

**NTeller: This probably has nothing to do with your friend, if you aren’t attracted to her in that way like you said. Although maybe you are (your description is kind of conflicting — you said you were straight but you called her pretty four separate times in one paragraph) It might just mean you’re sexually frustrated. That’s normal for a teenager!**

She ignores the parentheses — whatever, she probably worded it a little strangely. She had typed it up at 2am, after all. But that does make sense. The more time Carmilla spends at her house, the less alone time she has. Which probably explains why she keeps getting turned on at the drop of a hat, and probably explains the dream, too. To an extent. There’s something still eating away at her, but she shuts her computer, feeling a little better about the situation. She’s not about to send Carmilla home, knowing what she knows.

(Sh’ll just have to start taking longer showers.)

Carmilla takes one look at her phone before she pushes herself off the couch. “Well, it’s been fun, cupcake, but I’ve gotta head out.”

Laura rushes to put her computer on the coffee table and stand up too. “Where uh, where do you have to go?”

“Home.”

Laura’s stomach turns at the idea.

“I have to pick up some stuff for work, and I also need new clothes.” She pulls at the fabric of her t-shirt. “I can’t keep wearing your clothes.” She looks a little self-conscious, even though they both
know whose fault it really is that she hasn’t left the house.

“Are you gonna come back?”

Carmilla shakes her head and picks up the bag she had dropped by the couch earlier that morning — Laura hadn’t even realized she’d packed her things. “I told you yesterday, this isn’t a solution. I can’t just move in with you.” She shrugs. “Mother would get suspicious.”

Of course. She’s probably making things worse for her. “Oh God, does she know you’ve been here this whole time?” She points a finger at the ground as her head spins. There’s no way that Carmilla could get out of this without getting hurt if her Mother had punished her for even having Laura at her house.

“No. She has no idea.” Carmilla sits back down, her fingernails picking at one of the seams of the couch. Laura sits down next to her just as she talks again. “She told me to stay away from you. After you came by.”

“Why? Does she not let you have... I mean, is she strict about friends or something?” Every crappy comment she’s ever made about Carmilla not having friends etches their words into her heart and her eyes burn.

Carmilla shakes her head. “She doesn’t care as long as I keep them out of the house. This,” She gestures around the room, “Won’t even phase her. I don’t usually come home on the weekends if I can help it, anyway. Unless Will’s home.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Not your fault.”

She’s starting to lose count of how many times they’ve had that exchange.

“So she thinks you’re staying away from me?” She pulls her ankles towards her so that she can sit cross-legged across from Carmilla.

Carmilla copies her position and pulls her bag into her lap to lean her elbows against.“I certainly hope so.”

There’s two parts of her — the selfish part and the kind part. The selfish part loves that Carmilla is here, risking whatever the punishment. Laura doesn’t like to think about how bad it could be for her if her mother found out. And again — that’s the selfish part. The part that has the luxury of not knowing just how bad Carmilla has it. The part that takes that luxury. Then there’s the kind part, the part of her she got from her parents. The kind part of her hates the selfish pride she feels when Carmilla admits, “If she knew, I probably wouldn’t be anywhere near you right now.”

She’s glad that the kind part wins out. “Well, why aren’t you staying away, then? I mean, you’re risking getting caught with me, and if your Mother found out, she would—”

“Yeah, well...” She shrugs and looks down. “My mother already ruined the only relationship I ever really cared about by separating us and maybe I don’t feel like letting that happen again.” Carmilla’s eyes flit around for the room for a moment before they meet Laura’s. “I guess you’re worth it, or whatever.”

“Wow. That’s — I mean I know it’s all probably really complicated for you and there’s a lot more to it than — I know it’s not about me, but that means a lot.”
“Don’t be an idiot, of course it’s about you.”

Maybe she really needs to learn how to take a compliment because she’s suddenly so nervous. Laura focuses on the zipper of Carmilla’s backpack while she tries to control the heat rushing to her face. It takes a few awkward seconds for her to remember the point of this conversation. “So your Mom, do you think she’s already suspicious?”

“She won’t be if I come home.”

That’s not really the answer she was hoping for.

“But I don’t have to stay at home. I mean, I need clothes and a new book to read but... I could stay one more night.” Carmilla squeezes one of the straps of her bag in her grip.

Laura beams. “One more night.”

“Yeah. One more night.” Carmilla smiles just enough to show that she doesn’t mind this arrangement and Laura briefly worries about how long she can really keep this up.

(Her current plan? As long as she can manage.)

“But I really do have to go now.” She pushes herself up again and slings the bag over her shoulder. “Apparently I have to help Shonda’s daughter do inventory or whatever.” She takes another look at her phone, typing out a quick text while Laura stands up too.

It seems like a valid excuse, but something about it worries her more than it should. Maybe it’s just residual guilt — she’d missed so many signs already. “Oh, okay. Um, do you want me to have my Dad pick you up after work?”

She locks her phone and slips it into her back pocket. “I’ll text you when my shift ends.”

“Okay.” Laura nods and hugs her — it’s a lot quicker than their usual ones, because she smells like Laura’s shampoo and Carmilla’s hands snake around her back and for whatever reason it reminds her of her dream.

She pulls back too quickly and Carmilla frowns, “Um,” She blinks. “I’ll— I’ll text you.” Her hand moves to Laura’s hair when she leans forward to kiss Laura’s forehead as if she’d done this a thousand times. Carmilla leans back on her heel to put some distance between them and shakes her head. “Bye.”

(Leave it to Laura to make everything awkward.)

—

The lock releases with a soft click and Carmilla pushes the door open tentatively. Her house smells different — she never really thought about it much until she started spending time with Laura. Laura’s house smells like a million things all at once, but mostly it smells how it feels: warm. Heavy. Like a hug. Carmilla’s house smells empty, and a little bit like a furniture store.

Will isn’t home — for a few minutes she believes that her mother isn’t either — and she goes about raiding the kitchen until the click of expensive heels against the tiles makes the hair on the back of Carmilla’s neck stand up. She straightens her spine and closes the door of the pantry that she was looking into.

“Carmilla, can I ask you a question?”
She swallows and turns to face her mother. It’s rhetorical, so she doesn’t bother providing an answer. And she couldn’t if she tried, because she’s frozen — already planning out as many excuses as her mind can manage about where she’s been and who she’s been with before her mother speaks again.

“I buy you so many nice shirts.” Her hand pulls at the sleeve of her shirt — *Laura’s* shirt, the one she’d had to borrow after Laura had insisted she stay the night. Twice. But her Mother doesn’t seem to know or care about either of these things, which she really should have expected. If her Mother wasn’t there to misinterpret it, she would be rolling her eyes at her own stupidity. She should be grateful that her Mother could care less where she’s been or who she’s been with or what clothes she wears. She hums and lets her hand move to push Carmilla’s bangs out of her eyes. “Why do you always have to be so ungrateful?”

If she had the courage, she could say so much to that. But she won’t.

“I— I just haven’t— I need to do laundry. I’ve been away for a couple days.”

Stupid, stupid, *stupid*, why is she drawing attention to it, why is she talking at all?

Her mother turns to walk away, paying no attention to a word she had said. “Why do I bother with you, Carmilla? Why do I try so hard?”

Stupid, stupid, *stupid*, she’s an idiot for wanting her to care.

That’s all she says, and then her Mother disappears into her office and Carmilla is left alone, slumping back against the kitchen counter.

Will still isn’t home, but she writes him a note to leave on the bathroom mirror before she grabs her things: a nametag, the CD she had borrowed from Shonda on Friday, and a change of clothes. Carmilla leaves the pen on the bathroom sink and presses the sticky base of the slip to the glass.

*Please don’t forget to feed yourself, you teenage garbage disposal.*

She doesn’t write an *I love you*, but she doesn’t need to.

—

He’s *almost* starting to get tired when he rounds the corner of his street for the last time. Less practice on the field means he’s starting to get a little out of shape. He only ran two miles, but his mailbox still looks so far away.

Almost there.

He’s about to make the final push — he could sprint the rest — when his phone rings, cutting off his Styx song with another Styx song. Kirsch smiles at the caller ID and slows to a walk.

“Don’t tell me you need me to bail you out from jail.” He says it with a chuckle, and Sarah’s laugh joins his seconds later.

“Oh, you think you’re hilarious, huh? I get one DUI and now I’ve gotta hear this joke every time you pick up the phone.”

“Not *every* time.” He pauses to catch his breath ‘cause duh, jogging. “But you almost never call, so. Sorry if your bro has to jump to conclusions every once in a while.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. Hey, why are you out of breath? Ew, did I catch you watching porn or
“something? God, I thought I’d gotten away from that shit when I moved out.”

“Dude, no, I’m out running.”

“Whatever you say.” Kirsch hears Sarah shift on the other line just as he reaches his house. He checks the mailbox — nothing. “I guess you wouldn’t be needing to watch porn anyway, huh? Mom tells me you’ve got a girlfriend.”

“What? Why the fuck would she say that?” He takes his keys from his pocket and clumsily unlocks the door, balancing his phone in one hand and trying to unstick the door with the other.

“I don’t know, but she said you had a date with a really cute girl yesterday.”

Oh. “Did not.”

“Are you sure?”

(Yes. But also no.)

“Dude, she saw me with Danny.” He manages to unlock the door with his bad hand — it still sort of hurts, but whatever — and nudges Selina away from the screen before he shuts it behind him.

“Is that the Summer Society girl you were telling me about the other night?”

“Yeah, she’s super annoying and like, a total bitch.”

“She’s cute.”

“Did you miss the part where she’s a total bitch?” Kirsch swings open the refrigerator and grabs a gatorade. “Wait, how do you know that?”

“I’m looking at her facebook right now.”

“How did you find her facebook?” He leans back against the counter and sets the phone down, putting it on speaker.

“I’m still in the Summer Soc facebook group. She was not easy to find let me tell you. Mom said she was out of your league, so that pretty much narrowed it down to everyone.”

“You’re an ass.”

“And you’re a dick.”

“Bro, whatever. She’s not my girlfriend, she’s just a girl.”

“Do you think she’s into you?”

He groans, runs a hand over his face, and picks up the phone again, turning off the speakerphone setting. “Hello, have you forgotten our rule about girls? We don’t talk about my love life. Or my like life. Or my hate life. Anything in the romance category is off the table, alright?”

“Fine, fine. Alright your love life’s off the table, but mine’s not, so can I talk?”

Selina rubs her head against his leg and he reaches down to scoop her up. “How have you already got a girlfriend — your classes started like, a month ago. And I’m pretty sure you’ve never even left your dorm.”
“What can I say, I guess I’ve got game. And it helps that the girl I’m talking about is my roommate.”

“No way.”

“Way.”

“Which one? Wait, wait, let me guess. The weird one with the glasses?”

“Bingo.”

—

The sign on the door is flipped to ‘CLOSED’, so Carmilla frowns and her eyebrows raise when she hears the bell on the door ring.

She files the clipboard she was writing on between two records and turns the corner to see past a column of beginner’s books. Over a stack of *Guitar for Dummies*, she sees Laura offer her a small wave.

Carmilla swipes the clipboard and meets her at the front desk. “To what do I owe the honor?” The clipboard smacks softly against the counter. Laura looks flustered or sweaty, like she’s been running. She notices the bike helmet tucked under her arm and nods. “Prepping for the triathlon?”

Her hair is a little bit all over the place, and Laura starts to tuck it behind her ears with her free hand. “Hey, I just... wanted to come by and see if you were...”

“Here?”

“Busy.” She explains, but cringes. Carmilla’s got her.

“Did you think I lied about where I was going?”

Laura sets her bike helmet on the counter. “It’s just, it’s been a few hours. I wanted to make sure you got here safe.”

Carmilla tries to control the flush in her cheeks — this is embarrassing enough without Laura thinking she needs to be watched every second of the day like some child.

“I’ve been making it here safe for the last two years, sweetheart.” She doesn’t make an effort to make it sound any less harsh than it is.

Laura deflates. “You’re right, I’m sorry.” She shakes her head and picks up the helmet again. “I’m being totally clingy, aren’t I? I just — I don’t really know what to — this was too much, I’m sorry.”

Her concern is excessive and all kinds of humiliating, but that doesn’t really change the fact that it’s still a little bit cute.

But she still doesn’t feel comfortable with it yet.

“Yeah. Well, forget it, we can’t talk about this here, anyway. There’s customers and—”

A blonde head pokes out from the employees only door. “Hey, Carmilla, my Mom just texted me, she wants you to tune the good guitar? She said you’d know which one.”

“And co-workers.” She finishes.
Laura’s eyebrows scrunch together, her eyes looking between Carmilla and the blonde that she doesn’t recognize.

“Yeah, it’s the green Fender on the end. Tell her I already did.”

She nods and decides to step out completely from behind the door. “Hi,” She looks to Laura and then to Carmilla. “Aren’t we closed today?”

“She doesn’t count.” Carmilla shakes her head. “Elsie, this is Laura. Laura, Elsie.”

Elsie reaches her hand out to shake Laura’s from behind the counter. “Hi. Do you work here?”

“No, I’m just a... friend.” Laura rubs at her arm once she drops Elsie’s hand. “Do you work here?”

“Oh, no, not usually, I’m just here for a week. I just need to raise a little cash and my Mom said I could earn it here.”

Laura nods. “Oh, you’re the boss’ daughter?”

“Yep.”

Carmilla chews on the corner of her lip, looking between the two girls. There’s something strange between them. She’d only met Elsie an hour ago, but nothing about her made her seem threatening, to Carmilla or to Laura. Laura looks almost self-conscious under her gaze and Carmilla gets a good enough reason to explain the tension in the air when Elsie poses the next question.

“Sorry, are you and Carmilla... uh, are you two together?”

Carmilla isn’t sure whose eyes are wider, hers or Laura’s, but it’s definitely a close call. Laura is the first to speak, although she stumbles over her words even more than Carmilla imagines she would have, had she been able to get her tongue working again.

“Oh, no no no, we’re just— I came by ‘cause, I mean I come by a lot actually, I’m... We’re just really good friends.” Laura giggles a little and rolls her eyes at herself. “Best friends.”

(She feels like hearing that should sting, all things considered, but somewhere in the wreck that is her feelings towards Laura, that just makes her heart swell.)

Carmilla nods. “Yeah.”

Elsie is smiling politely and she takes it as an opportunity to distract from this increasingly awkward moment. “Um, we still need to finish inventory. I’m halfway done with my list.”

Laura nods. “Yeah, I should probably go.”

“No.” Carmilla’s hand reaches for Laura’s wrist before she can really think about it, but whatever. What’s one more poorly thought out decision? “You should hang out here for a while. I mean, since you biked all the way out here anyway.”

“Okay.”

Elsie has already gotten herself distracted by the list on Carmilla’s clipboard, but she hums in agreement. “Yeah, it’s pretty quiet around here, I don’t think my Mom would mind us having some company.”

“Cool.”
JP (11:02pm): yoo

JP (11:05pm): so i was talking to the guy who gets me the uh, stuff i gave you the other night and i was thinking, he gives me a pretty solid discount since we’re buddies

JP (11:29pm): what i mean is if shit gets hectic again, i could hook you up

JP (12:11am): you there?

Danny groans when Carmilla answers another prompt from their Lit teacher with — surprise, surprise — an even more pretentious statement than the last one. It’s not even early anymore, but third period feels like 7am when Carmilla decides she’s going to take up the entire class. Carmilla is in one of her rare good moods, and that means Danny has to sit through a speech about the several metaphors at work in *The Lord of the Flies*.

It’s a crappy book anyway, and Danny is grateful when her phone vibrates in her pocket.

Kirsch (10:12am): if u get a friend request from a sarah jacobs dont accept it ok

Danny almost never checks facebook, but when she switches to her facebook app, there’s two friend requests there. One from Will — which she accepts, that kid’s not so bad for a Zeta. And one from a Sarah Jacobs, who she doesn’t recognize, but Kirsch clearly doesn’t like her.

Why not?

danny L (10:15am): Too late.

Kirsch (10:16am): she’s a stalker

She flips through her photos until she finds one of the girl, Sarah Jacobs, and Kirsch.

An ex-girlfriend? Why would his ex-girlfriend add her?

The caption reads ‘me and the little bro’, despite the fact that she’s at least a foot shorter than Kirsch. *His sister*. She has to be a half-sister, because they look nothing alike.

(Oh, but she could have some fun with this.)

danny L (10:16am): She’s a cute stalker. Should I message her back?

She’ll have to actually send her a message later, in case he asks.

Kirsch (10:16am): NO!

danny L (10:19am): :) 

Kirsch (10:20am): danny...

danny L (10:21am): :)
Laura has a pretty strict note taking policy in all her classes — she’s forgetful and she procrastinates studying a lot, so she does try to write down as much as she can in class. But lately, Carmilla has kind of ruined that habit for her — at least in health class.

But today? Definitely not Carmilla’s fault. Laura stares at the blank page of notes she should have been writing, scribbles a few concentric squiggles in the corner of the sheet, and slips her phone out of her bag.

She positions it behind her water bottle and Carmilla doesn’t bat an eye from where she sits, her arm sprawled out across the table and a book in her hand. A few taps to the screen later and she pulls up her question post. Yesterday afternoon there had been only seven total responses, now there were eleven, and eight of them suggested that she should consider her attraction to people — specifically women. She was supposed to think about her sexuality. Think about girls.

She’d done that. She’d done a lot of that while she watched Elsie and Carmilla work.

At this point she sees two possibilities. The first being that it was a complete fluke, like the time she’d dreamed of kissing Danny or the time she’d dreamed that her Dad was Santa Claus — totally ridiculous, he doesn’t have the beard for it. And if that’s the case, she really needs to stop thinking about it so much. Laura figures it’s some kind of placebo effect — she was attracted to Carmilla in the dream, obviously, and now she feels that same tug in the pit of her stomach every time Carmilla smiles at her or touches her hand or kisses her forehead. That residual feeling is bound to go away soon, though.

Unless it’s the second option. She’s considered it, and there is some evidence to suggest that it could be a possibility. It actually makes like, a lot of sense, all things considered. So, she might like girls too, and if she does that’s — well, it’s new, but it’s also kind of awesome. Girls are awesome.

She kind of wants to ask Carmilla about this stuff, but there’s something stopping her. Laura knows it’s more complicated than just I think I might like girls. And she also knows it’s more complicated than I had a dream where I liked you. Because first of all, she knows she doesn’t actually have a crush on her best friend. She’s worked that part out already — it’s the dream placebo or whatever. It would still feel weird to bring it up, she thinks. Or it would be totally fine, and then she’d say something stupid and make everything weird anyway.

Not that her excruciating awkwardness should even be a blip right now, because even past the complicated mess that is her mind today, she really needs to keep things in perspective. She doesn’t have time to worry about this right now, since she hasn’t really worked out what excuse she’s going to use to convince Carmilla to stay the night again — all she knows is she needs to.

Yeah. Definitely not the time to get distracted with her own stupid problems, and definitely not the time to put those problems on Carmilla’s plate.

“Hey,” She nudges Carmilla’s shoulder and waits for her to sit up, the book in her hand sliding shut. “Are you working tonight?”

Mr. Beckett gives them a look, the one that Laura likes to call the ‘one day my face is going to get stuck like this because I give you two girls this exact look at least four times a day’ look. Carmilla ignores it.

“Yeah, I have to work all week since Shonda’s daughter has no idea what she’s doing.”
Right. Elsie. Laura pouts a little. She kind of hoped she could film some stuff on her new camera at the shop — she’s been dying to test it out, but that thought feels silly when she remembers that Elsie will be there, too.

That doesn’t stop her next train of thought, though. “Can I come by while you guys are at work?”

Carmilla nods. “Yeah, you can always come by.”

—

“Oh, I have a question,” their Dad says as they both climb into his truck. LaFontaine has flawlessly mastered this skill, despite being a solid foot shorter than the truck is. “How the hell is your beat up little Jetta from the last millenium still running perfectly, while this baby,” He smacks the dashboard of the truck, “Is already complaining. I got it two years ago.”

They laugh. ‘Perfectly’ is not a word they would use anywhere near their car, but it is a pretty impressive trooper of a car. “Science,” LaFontaine explains. “It’s all science.”

“I looked at the price o’ tire repairs last night, maybe you could work some of that science crap on my truck and save us a thousand bucks or so.”

That’s actually bullshit — they don’t know a damn thing about cars. But it has been running a little smoother lately, thanks to JP.

“You know, JP actually knows some stuff about cars. You know that rattle that kept coming from the engine? He fixed it. He’s good with machines.”

“Oh.” Their Dad looks over a couple times and then focuses on the road. “So, uh, how’s it going with JP?”

They swallow past the lump in their throat. “Um, good.”

“Yeah? What’s going on between you two?”

“We’re just... hanging out.” It’s not a lie but their palms are sweating, and it has nothing to do with the empty mint container on their nightstand, or the texts from JP that they answered this morning, the minute Perry had slipped away from them to use the restroom between first and second period. No, that doesn't really worry them — although maybe it should — but their stress has nothing to do with any of that and everything to do with the implication in his voice.

“Hanging out? Is that teenager talk for something else?”

(Boy, does he have no idea. But what can they say?

Sure Dad, me and Perry, we hang out all the time. Speaking of which, I slept over at her house last night and we beat our running record for how many minutes we can kiss without one of us laughing or stopping. I’d say 51 minutes is impressive, how about you, Dad?)

“We just hang out.”

“Alright.” He smiles like he knows something they don’t, and they let him. It’s easier to handle him thinking that they’re dating JP than him wondering why they aren’t.

LaFontaine doesn’t really have the time to consider all the ways that probably makes them a terrible person, because their Dad is turning up the radio and singing along to the intro of *Save a Horse,*
Ride a Cowboy. They both laugh, it was always his favorite song, and LaFontaine’s Mom always gets frustrated when they drop everything to sing the lyrics the moment it comes on.

The bass vibrates through the car and their Dad fake strums a few guitar chords against the stick shift. They both stumble over the first few lyrics because they’re laughing and they’ve never been very good with their timing when they sing, but when the chorus hits, they manage to get every word right.

‘Cause I saddle up my horse, and I ride into the city

I make a lot of noise, ‘cause the girls they are so pretty

Riding up and down Broadway on my old stud Leroy and the girls say:

Save a horse, ride a cowboy!

Everybody says,

Save a horse, ride a cowboy!

LaFontaine lets their voice go hoarse while they finish the Big & Rich song — he’s Big, they’re Rich. The music is loud and their voice isn’t used to singing at this octave, but LaFontaine doesn’t think they’ll have many of these moments — the good ones — with their parents once they come out.

They might as well cherish the good memories while they can still make them.

—

Somehow, a sack of flour had managed to ruin Carmilla Karnstein’s life.

In a world where Laura Hollis had never asked to be her partner on some stupid health project, she might have felt butterflies in her stomach right now. Or whatever she’s supposed to feel when a pretty girl touches her arm, leans in close, and talks about musicians and concerts that she’d kill to see. For whatever reason, some cruel God has decided that that’s not the world Carmilla gets. No, she gets the one where the girl she’s shamelessly falling for sits barely fifteen feet away, making it difficult, to say the least, to do pretty much anything about this situation. Difficult to flirt, for one. Elsie is beautiful. She’s taller than Laura and her hair is a lighter shade, but she’s more confident than Laura is and Carmilla hasn’t decided if she likes that about her or not. It’s a stark contrast to what she knows about herself, she’s never been able to take up a room the way that Elsie does. Laura is more like Carmilla — neither of them really matter in a crowd, but it doesn’t stop them from feeling like they’re more than enough for each other. Or at least that’s the way she feels, and she likes to pretend Laura feels that, too. Elsie isn’t anything like that, she’s the reason for the crowd, she’s proud of the space she takes up. Maybe that extra confidence is what’s keeping her from flirting back.

Does she like confidence? She can’t remember if she’s ever cared either way.

(Probably not.)

She knows that it’s probably not Elsie at all; it’s the way Laura keeps staring at them — it’s distracting. She can’t flirt with an audience. Especially when that audience is Laura.

Screw it, she thinks. Carmilla taps a CD on the counter. “I’ve never been to one of their concerts, but I’ve heard they’re alright.” She’s heard they’re amazing.
“Oh, the 1975? They’re phenomenal. Saw them in concert a few months ago, actually. With my girlfriend.” She cringes. “Uh, ex-girlfriend, now.”

And there goes the last shred of an excuse she has to not flirt back. She was pretty sure that Elsie was interested before, but now she’s definitely gay and definitely single and Carmilla should definitely be flirting back.

(Laura’s still definitely staring, too.)

Whatever, Laura’s a crush, not a girlfriend. This is probably Laura’s fucked up version of being a wingman or something.

She flirts back, because she’s been beating around the bush and it’s about time that she moves on anyway. She stares at her and smiles in that way that Carmilla knows makes girls weak. “Her loss, then.”

(Girls that are interested, anyway. It works well enough on Elsie.)

She smiles and continues to stack CDs into piles on the countertop. “You’re probably right. But,” With a sigh, she says, “Doesn’t change the fact that I have to see her again pretty soon. Which I’m kind of dreading.”

Carmilla reclines in her chair to reach for the can of soda behind her. “Why’s that?”

“I’m going to this music festival in Houston, the one I mentioned earlier.” Carmilla nods and she continues, “Well, we have a mutual friend who’s in a band that’s playing. She’ll probably be there and she’s probably gonna have a hot date.”

“You know what you’ve gotta do right?” Carmilla downs the rest of her soda — there’s not much left, and shrugs. “Bring a hotter date.”

“That’s the plan.” Elsie grins, and she really is kind of cute.

Carmilla could like her, if she tried. She could date her. She could kiss her until she forgets about Laura.

She honestly doesn’t need another Elle in her life.

They’re not the same, Laura and Elle. They could never compare. But getting over Elle — it wasn’t the hardest thing she’s ever had to do, not by a longshot. That didn’t make it any easier.

Not that she could ever get that lucky with Laura. The fact that Elle had believed her to be good enough was a miracle in and of itself.

But Elsie’s less complicated. She’s a lot less safety, home, and warmth. She’s a lot less aching, a lot less hope. She’s a lot less Laura. And she’s not bad looking, Carmilla could do much worse. They’ve established that they have a lot in common — music, clothes, and Elsie can appreciate a crunch wrap.

(Carmilla asked.)

And it’s been a long time since she’s kissed anybody. It’s one of the most pointless things she craves, but she did always enjoy kissing.

This could work, and she tells herself that it will. But then she glances at Laura and she’s been
staring back for a while now. Laura offers her a shy smile, and Carmilla’s a goner all over again.

(Elsie’s not going anywhere. She can try to make it work tomorrow.)

—

Some time between Carmilla showing Elsie how to organize the instruments on the back wall and Carmilla and Elsie doing inventory in the storage room, Laura decides to put in her headphones and listen to *Fireproof* for the hundredth time, because why not. It doesn’t look like she’s going to be getting any attention from Carmilla today, not that she should have expected anything more than just the talk they had on the walk to the store. This is Carmilla’s job, she can’t always pay attention to her.

Still, it’s kind of nice to hang out here. She got some homework done already, and read another chapter of *Room 317*.

She opted to stay away from the faberry fic that she was reading because things were starting to get... complicated in that department. But that hadn’t been much help, either, because there’s like, several chapters of *Room 317* that deal with sexuality, and maybe Laura should just give up on reading any kind of fanfiction today. She really can’t think about that stuff right now.

She has to think of Carmilla, and trying to figure out a solution, even if Carmilla says it’s pointless.

(It’s probably pointless, but Laura Hollis doesn’t give in that easily.)

When Elsie and Carmilla leave the storage room, Laura lets herself stare a little while they work. Elsie puts her hand on Carmilla’s arm and Laura almost stands up to stop her, but there’s a line between protective and possessive and she’s dangerously close to crossing it. Just because she knows things doesn’t mean she gets to shield Carmilla from everything that could hurt her, no matter how much she wants to. That’s what her Dad does, and it drives her nuts.

But, still. She doesn’t really like Elsie.

From what Laura’s gotten out of the conversation that she really shouldn’t be eavesdropping on, Elsie is single. She almost texts Danny because she’s single too, and Elsie is pretty, so Laura doesn’t really see what could go wrong with setting them up. Except maybe for the fact that she knows nothing about Elsie besides the fact that she keeps touching Carmilla.

And like, flirting. She’s pretty sure they’re flirting. Which is cool, too.

Except it’s not, and that’s totally selfish of her. But this is her best friend, the first real best friend Laura’s ever had, and she thinks of what LaFontaine and Perry have, and something in her gut twists when she watches Carmilla and Elsie talk about a concert. When she hears the word ‘date’ coming from Carmilla’s mouth, her face heats up.

At this point, she probably couldn’t be more self serving if she tried, but clearly her mind is working to make that a possibility because she’s admittedly jealous. Really, really, jealous.

Elsie is older than her. Elsie is a lot cooler, she recognizes all the bands that Carmilla mentions, and she’s asking her about some concert, so they’re probably going on a date together. And Laura is happy for her, because Carmilla does deserve to be happy and have a girlfriend, but mostly she’s just jealous.

Sometimes it feels like Laura is always just going to be the third wheeling friend. And on one hand, she knows that’s stupid, because friendship should never come second to relationships. They could
easily exist on the same plane, complements of each other. But that was never the way it was with LaFontaine and Perry or Danny and her girlfriends or boyfriends. And Laura really doesn’t want it to be that way with Carmilla.

It’s not like Laura is going to get into any relationship like that anytime soon, not looking or dressing or acting the way that she does. But Carmilla could. She’s beautiful and smart and funny and Laura could probably list all her greatest qualities if she hadn’t already promised herself that she would stop thinking about her dream, and that’s a path she can’t help but go down when she thinks too much about the way it felt to kiss her best friend — to want her in a new, really scary, kind of way.

But that’s not the only thing she has to stop thinking about, this entire thought process is stupid and selfish, and it should really be the last thing on her list of things to worry about. Whether or not Carmilla is spending her free time with Laura or not shouldn’t even be a concern if she isn’t safe. Laura pouts and closes a few apps on her phone to save battery power. She closes the Yahoo! Answers tab in her browser, because all the answers that come in are saying the exact same thing. She doesn’t need to read them again.

She breaks her promise one more time when Carmilla looks at her and she can’t help but smile a little because she really is pretty and she just makes Laura happy — really, really happy. Like she was in the dream, except that was a different kind of happy.

She’s really looking forward to the moment that those thoughts fade away and she can go back to the way it was before.

(That should happen any day now.)

—

“Popcorn or ice cream?” Perry asks from the kitchen.

Danny drops herself onto Perry’s couch. “Hmm, popcorn. It’s a popcorn kind of episode.”

She doesn’t have a clue what that means, this is more LaFontaine’s territory, but Perry hasn’t had much time with her friends lately, and she misses Danny, so. She’ll watch a few episodes of Legend of Korra, if it means spending time with her friends.

“So, where’s LaF today?”

Perry drums her fingers on the counter in front of the microwave as the bag starts to pop. “Oh, you know, they’re spending some time with their family.” She doesn’t think about that too much, because everything between them is a little better now, even if things are tense. But regardless, family isn’t exactly Perry’s favorite subject these days.

“They treat LaF like shit, even my parents aren’t that bad and I still can’t stand them.”

“Trust me, I know.”

Danny pours the popcorn into the bowl and stares at it for a minute. “Hey, can I ask you something?”
“Of course.” Perry takes a handful of popcorn kernels into her hand and eats them one by one, just as Danny shoves at least ten in her mouth at once.

“Is Kirsch different these days?” She asks around a mouthful of popcorn.

“What do you mean, different?”

“Just—” Danny chews, swallows, and tries again. “Like, has he been acting any different? Treating you different?”

“No.” She thinks on it for a moment, because she really hasn’t been spending enough time with her friends lately, and maybe Danny’s right. She could be missing something. But she can’t think of any noticeable changes — Kirsch is a sweet guy, he’s always been a sort of constant in that way. “I don’t think so.”

“Are you sure?”

Perry shrugs and takes a sip of the soda she had poured into a glass. “He’s always been just Kirsch.”

“Yeah, see, that used to piss me off. But now it doesn’t.” Danny takes the bowl a little too aggressively and they move to the couch.

Perry curls up in one corner with her drink. “Is that a bad thing?”

“Uh, I got a text from him this morning and I smiled. Of course it’s a bad thing.”

She says it like it’s clearly a tragic situation and Perry presses her lips together to conceal a smile.

“Whatever, I don’t know why I’m wasting time thinking about it.” Danny picks up the remote. “We should watch Korra, this is a really good episode.”

(There really wishes LaFontaine was here — there’s nobody to smile knowingly at, but she’ll have to remember to tell them about this conversation later. It’s certainly an interesting development.)

—

Laura (8:12pm): can carm stay the night again?

Dad (8:14pm): Isn’t that three nights in a row?

Laura (8:14pm): is it?

Dad (8:14pm): Yes, it is.

Laura (8:15pm): oh

Laura (8:15pm): is that a yes?

Dad (8:18pm): Is her Mother okay with this?

Laura (8:18pm): Yep.

Dad (8:20pm): I’m trusting you on that.

Dad (8:20pm): Am I picking you girls up soon?
Laura (8:21pm): carm’s shift ends at 9

Dad (8:22pm): I’ll see you at 8:59

Laura (8:23pm): thanks dad

Laura (8:23pm): for like, everything.

“Hey, so, I was thinking.” Laura drapes herself across the counter that Carmilla sits behind. Her feet are up on the counter and she hasn’t moved in half an hour, so clearly she’s hard at work. Elsie has been doing most of the manual labor, with Carmilla supervising and by supervising, she clearly means reading, talking to Laura, and eating an entire bag of pretzels from Shonda’s snack stash, because that’s the only thing she’s been doing.

She looks up from her book. “Uh oh.”

“No, no, it’s a good thought. Hear me out here.” Laura stands up straight. “So, like, it’s a Tuesday, and my Dad’s coming to pick us up after your shift, but I was thinking... Well, he doesn’t really need to drop you off at home, does he? ‘Cause it’s a Tuesday, and Faking It is on in like an hour and a half anyway. We’d be watching it together on the phone if he dropped you off at your house, so why don’t we just go back to my house and stay the night?” It’s weak, it’s a horrible excuse, but she’s really hoping it’ll work. “Plus, we’ll save on minutes. And, and, and cable, too.”

Carmilla sighs and raises her eyebrows. “I know what you’re doing.”

“Trying to save us money? It’s an admirable thing.”

“Laura.”

“Please?” She tries to pull the pleading look that always works on her Dad and oddly enough, it works on Carmilla in record time.

“Fine.”

“Yay!” Laura barely conceals her fist pump, “Oh! And according to the promos, Amy throws like a glass of champagne or something into Liam’s face, so this should be a good episode for you.”

“Thank God, someone needs to get that beefcake off his pretentious high horse.”

Carmilla starts talking about all the reasons Liam is the worst character in existence — and Laura kind of agrees, but she honestly doesn’t care what Carmilla is talking about because she’s relieved. So relieved that it worked. That’s at least one less night that she has to worry about her.

—

Laura’s bathroom door shuts and Carmilla drops herself on the bed — she’s really going to hate going back home, mostly because Laura’s bed is comfortable as fuck. She pulls out her phone and there’s a voicemail. She’s rolling her eyes before she even hits play.

Hey, asshole. I know your new girlfriend probably has you tied up or something... figuratively or sexually, but believe it or not some people around here actually miss you, so maybe answer your phone every once in a while? And you better bring home some groceries when you stop camping out on your little sex vacation ‘cause Mom’s cooking is really disgusting these days. Kay. Bye. Call me, you piece of shit.
Carmilla grins and hits the dial back button immediately. The shower turns on from the other side of the bathroom door, and Laura takes really long showers already, so she doesn’t worry about anybody overhearing her conversation.

Will picks up after four rings. “Well, well, well. She lives.”

“Hey, dispshit, what’d I miss?”

“Oh, not much, just the usual. Mom has been kind of a raging bitch lately, you’re lucky you’ve been gone.”

“She’d kill you if she heard you saying that.”

No, she wouldn’t. But she’d be pissed.

“I’d blame you.”

“She probably would too.”

“Hey, any chance your girlfriend would take me in too? You wouldn’t believe this, she made me vacuum the entire house this afternoon for talking back. Do you know how big this house is?”

“Sounds torturous.”

Carmilla kind of loves how innocent they’ve managed to keep him.

“It was.”

“And she’s not my girlfriend, so why don’t you keep your mouth shut about her?”

“Please. You’re telling me you’ve spent the last four days by her side and she’s just a friend?”

“Shut up, jackass, I’m here for the free food.”

“I’m sure the pretty girl has nothing to do with it, then?”

(Only everything, actually.)

“Hey, do you want me to hang up on you?”

“No.”

“Didn’t think so.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
Everybody Wanna Take Her Heart Away

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 15, or the one where drunken words equal sober thoughts.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Alcohol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kirsch (3:34pm): hey...so we probably have tons to do for homecoming right

Kirsch (3:35pm): and i was thinking we could maybe meet up to finalize some of the plans

danny L (3:49pm): Hey, that’s a great idea. When are you free this week? The only day I can’t do is tomorrow. But I’m good from Thursday afterwards.

Kirsch (3:50pm): ya no that’s cool. i was thinkin maybe friday??

danny L (3:52pm): Friday works for me. Where did you want to meet?

Kirsch (3:53pm): i just found a flyer for shu shu's. they actually do a 2for1 deal on fridays. r u down?

Kirsch (4:07pm): or we could meet at the school or something

Kirsch (4:09pm): ???

danny L (4:12pm): Sorry, my mom needed me. Yeah, Shu Shu’s sounds great.

Kirsch (4:12pm): k awesome. so like i can pick you up obviously

Kirsch (4:15pm): no its like totally on the way..what time do u wanna go?

Kirsch (4:16pm): ya but like reservations and stuff

Kirsch (4:18pm): hows 7??

Kirsch (4:23pm): 7 is perfect.

danny L (4:23pm): We should probably bring another Summer Soc and Zeta to help us organize
“I kind of have a weird question for you.”

LaFontaine tenses from their spot on the floor. They finish scribbling the answer to their math problem and turn to him. JP is lying on his bed throwing a tennis ball in the air. When he sees them facing him he tosses the ball across the room and sits up, leaning against the wall.

“What’s up?”

“Okay, so,” he rubs his hands on his jeans, “I don’t know about you but my parents are still kinda on my case to get a girlfriend.”

“Oh, yeah, my parents are all about me having a girlfriend.”

JP smiles, “You know what I mean, jackass.”

LaF tries to lift their lips into a smile. Their chest hurts. “Yeah, yeah - I’m just joking.”

“So, like, I was thinking. My parents are pretty much convinced that we’re dating,” he motions between the two of them, “And I thought that if I didn’t really confirm or deny it then I could just...let them keep thinking it?”

LaFontaine nods. They’ve basically been doing this with their parents for the past week and now that they think about it, they should have probably stopped and asked JP first.

(They should probably stop doing a lot of things.)

“I mean, it’s not just for my sake. If your parents are on your back, it kind of helps you out because they don’t have to question anything with Perry or like any of your gender stuff.”

LaFontaine looks down and feels a genuine smile grow this time. JP has been really great about their gender identity and they’re glad they decided to tell him.

(If only everyone could be that easy.)

“Yeah, you know that’s a really good point.”

JP leans forward and dangles his legs off the side of the bed, “Really? So you’re totally cool with this?”

They shrug, “Well, yeah. Why not?”

“I don’t know,” he scratches his jaw, “I just didn’t want to cause any trouble between you and Perry.”

LaFontaine pauses, a vice suddenly wrapped around their chest. They can feel the familiar panic creeping up their spine. Right, Perry.

(Perry. Perry. Perry.)

They scribble a few doodles on their page - some spirals that they identify a bit too much with lately -
and they nod, “Yeah, of course. Thanks for thinking of her.”

(Someone has to at this point.)

“So - she’ll be cool with it?”

Well, she would probably have to know to have an opinion. “Yeah, don’t worry.”

The walls are feeling a bit too close. Their palms are starting to sweat and they try to focus on the next question of their homework.

“Nice. So, we’re fake dating now,” LaFontaine looks up and laughs at the disgusted look on his face, “I hope you know I’m not gonna start paying for stuff now when we hang out.”

“What? You’re not? Well, I’m out of here then. Fuck this plan.”

JP laughs and throws his pillow at them, “Fuck off. And hurry up with your homework so we can talk strategy for the new level we unlocked last week.”

“I’m trying my hardest, asshole. Give me some time.”

JP lies back onto his bed with a dramatic sigh, picking up a comic from his nightstand and leafing through it.

(They really are trying - honestly. They just hope it’s for the best.)

-----

Laura paces around her room. She’s supposed to be working on her homework but after staring at the question for fifteen minutes and only being able to think of kissing Carmilla, she’s decided to give herself a break.

Dream Carmilla, though. Not the real Carmilla. Which she has been making very clear to herself this entire week because she doesn’t want things to start getting weird.

But, okay, so maybe Laura likes girls.

Which is not as scary as she may have thought - but it is very confusing. First off, where did this even come from? Second off, what is she supposed to do with this information?

If this was any other problem, she would go to Carmilla. And in this case this is probably the best thing to talk to her about because Carmilla is gay. But something is holding Laura back. Every time she tries to bring it up she feels the words get mixed up at the back of her throat. She’s dying to spit them out and get Carmilla to explain things, but she can’t seem to find the words whenever she has the chance.

Plus, since Carmilla’s spending all of her time with that girl lately it’s not like they have a lot of alone time to talk about such important things.

(Laura conveniently ignores the time she spends with Carmilla at home after she’s done work.)

She frowns. Right now Carmilla is probably having a wonderful time with her new favourite person while Laura is stuck here having an existential crisis.

Laura should text her. But that might be too clingy. Right? Maybe.
But maybe *not*.

She quickly pulls up her messages and stares at the screen for seven minutes before crafting the perfect text.

**Laura (7:18pm):** *Hey! How’s work going?*

She smiles. That will have to do. She would usually hang out at work with Carmilla but she has already been there every day this week.

**Carm (7:23pm):** *boring as usual. you should have just come by and finished your homework in the back*

Yes, that would have been a great plan if she wasn’t distracted the entire time staring at Carmilla and Elsie. While they talked. Or laughed. Or flirted. She’s gotten no homework done this week all because of that floozy. Whatever.

**Laura (7:30pm):** *That sucks :( :( :( and I wish but I really need to get work done and it’s hard to concentrate around you*

Laura shoves that uneasy feeling in her chest to the back of her mind.

**Laura (7:30pm):** *I mean, it’s just easier in my room with no noise*

**Carm (7:31pm):** *whatever you say, cupcake. it’s not the same here without you*

She grins at her screen. It feels like that moment on Christmas day when she sees her presents for the first time.

**Laura (7:31pm):** *Softie :p*

**Laura (7:32pm):** *You’re still staying over tonight right? Cause we can come pick you up again*

**Carm (7:33pm):** *Laura...I’ve stayed over every night this week*

Laura’s chesttightens. Every time she asks Carmilla she gets the cool, sinking feeling in her stomach, knowing that eventually she’ll have to say no.

**Laura (7:33pm):** *Yeah, but you totally stay over on Friday nights sometimes. Why break tradition?*

She knows it’s a flimsy excuse - but so have been the previous four - so she holds her breath waiting for the answer.

**Carm (7:34pm):** *I guess one more night won’t hurt*

**Laura (7:35pm):** *Great! That’s perfect. We can even get ready for the party tomorrow night together*

**Carm (7:36pm):** *I don’t think I’ll be able to go to the party because I have plans with Elsie*

Laura stops pacing and scowls. Of course. She knew that they may have had plans - since it’s all that tramp talked about this week - but she was hoping Carmilla would still choose Laura. Or, the party, she means. Because the party came first and this date came second and Carmilla should really prioritize where her loyalties lie before just tossing aside all past aspects of her life.
Laura (7:40pm): Cool. I'll let you get back to work though. Text me when you wanna be picked up

Laura (7:41pm): And if you’re gonna shower again tonight it wouldn’t kill you to clean the hair out of the drain, you know.

Laura stalks to her bed and dives onto it face first, pushing her phone under her pillow. That was harsh, but she’ll deal with Carmilla’s reply later. Possibly when her stomach doesn’t hurt so much. She should go downstairs and have some dinner, but she’s not finished that homework yet. She already told her dad she was waiting to eat until she finishes, and if she goes downstairs now she’ll have to explain that she wasn’t able to actually finish any problems because she’s too busy realizing she’s gay.

And, well - totally not the time for that right now.

She flips over and stares at the ceiling before groaning and pulling a pillow over her face. Tomorrow’s a new day.

(A new day where she still has homework and is still probably gay, but she can deal with that later.)

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Kirsch drums along to the radio, shifting in his seat as his stomach continues to turn. He’s had this feeling ever since he changed after school before picking up Danny, Christine and Ryan, and he seriously does not want it to ruin his appetite.

(Perhaps he’s nervous because this is a seriously expensive tie. With his track record, he’s likely to spill so much food on it before the night is over.)

He starts to hum along to Chandelier when Danny switches the station.

“Dude,” Ryan looks at him in the rearview mirror, “You never let me change the music in here. You’re always such a little bitch about it - what gives?”

Kirsch grips the steering wheel, “Nothing gives.” He switches the station back.

Danny turns to him, “What the fuck, Kirsch?”

He shrugs, “My truck. My music.”

“Yeah, right,” she rolls her eyes, “You stopped that rule with me a while ago.”

Danny’s eyes widen slightly and they both still. Kirsch can see Ryan grinning at him in the rearview mirror. He focuses back on the road, “Well, maybe I was just trying to to be nice. Since you’re always such a bitch. So my truck, my music.”

“Your music sucks.”

“If you don’t like it you can walk.”

Christine laughs nervously from the back, “This is definitely the weirdest start to a double date that I’ve ever had.”

Kirsch tears his eyes off of the road to look at her in the mirror, “Wait, what?”

“Kirsch, stop!”
He looks ahead and quickly jerks the steering wheel to the right to try and avoid the debris in the middle of the road. It’s too late and the truck bumps over it as Kirsch struggles with one hand to steer them to the side of the road while throwing the other across Danny. The truck comes to a sudden halt.

“Holy shit,” he turns to Danny, “Are you okay?”

She nods quickly and he turns towards the back, “You guys good?”

Ryan rips off his seatbelt, “Yeah, no thanks to you, you moron.”

Kirsch blows out a breath and closes his eyes, “Fuck off.” His heart is racing and he gets out of the truck before he starts thinking about that day again.

They all pile out of the truck and Kirsch turns to Danny, “Why did you make this sound like a date?”

“I didn’t!”

“Well, she was sure under that impression.”

“Um, dude, I thought it was a date, too,” Ryan circles the front of the truck to take a look at the blown tire, “But I think there’s more important things to figure out here.”

Danny ignores him, raising her eyebrows at Kirsch, “So why did you make this sound like a date?”

Christine looks between the two of them, “Wait - so this really isn’t a double date?”

Danny and Kirsch whip their heads towards her, both biting out, “No.”

“Yeah, but-” she looks between them all before turning back to Danny, “You told me we were going out to dinner with them, made me confirm every day this week and you changed your outfit like three times when we were getting ready at my house.”

Kirsch turns to Danny. Her cheeks are pinking and she’s clenching her fists, looking like she’s ready to launch at Christine any second now.

“That’s not - I was just trying on some of your stuff because they looked nice. Don’t be so weird.”

The knot in Kirsch’s stomach continues to grow. He can’t stop looking at Danny, wondering what the look on her face means.

“Listen,” Ryan hooks his thumb over his shoulder, “There’s that retro ice cream place a few blocks away. We could take this double date there?”

“Dude, this wasn’t a date.”

Ryan sighs, “Whatever. Let’s just go because it’s better than standing by the side of the road.”

“I’m lactose intolerant.” The group looks to Danny, “What? There’s nothing for me to eat at the ice cream place.”

Kirsch shakes his head, “Fuck, I can’t just leave my truck here. I’ll have to call a tow truck or something,” he runs a hand over the top of his head, “Ryan, just go without us.”

“Um, I’m sure I could order a soda or something.”
“No, no - Kirsch is right,” Ryan waves Danny off and throws his arm around Christine’s shoulder, looking down at her and grinning, “We’ll be fine on our own.”

Kirsch rolls his eyes as they walk away, pulling out his phone to find the number for roadside assistance. Danny stands off to the side, stilted and arms crossed, looking everywhere but him. He sighs, “If you wanna go watch them make out be my guest.”

She scowls at him, “Fuck off.”

“Whatever,” he scrolls through his contacts and can’t focus on reading the names. His heart is racing and his chest tightens. He presses his fingers hard against his eyes and tries to take a deep breath.

Danny sneers, “God, are you that disgusted at the idea that this was a double date?”

“Dude, like you were so excited about it.”

“I didn’t almost crash a car because of it!” She kicks some gravel, “And at least I’m not this upset. Jesus, it’s almost insulting.”

“She died in a car crash, okay?” Danny’s face goes blank, “So forgive me if I’m a bit shaken up that I could have hurt someone I care about again.”

It’s silent except for the chirping of a few birds in the trees by the road. Danny takes a few steps forward, her expression softening, “That wasn’t your fault.”

“Yeah, no, I know.”

(He doesn’t.)

She nods, “And neither was this. That shit was everywhere - if we didn’t go off the side of the road we would have probably ended up in the other lane onto oncoming traffic. Plus, Ryan is fine, so - you know, you didn’t hurt anyone today.”

(If she convinces herself he was talking about Ryan then maybe Kirsch can, too.)

He nods then turns away from her - the concern in her eyes is too much to look at right now and he doesn’t deserve it - and finally finds the number for the tow truck. After giving them a call he pockets his phone and turns back to her, “They’ll be about an hour, so if you wanna call to get picked up or anything go for it.”

She hesitates, “Well, we might as well use this time to talk about homecoming.”

Kirsch balks and he feels his face heat up, “What?”

“Um, homecoming?” Danny raises her eyebrows, “You know, the reason we were getting together tonight?”

He feels he can breathe a little easier, “Oh yeah, yeah - of course. We can, uh,” he goes to grab his notebook from the front seat and throws it into the bed of the truck, “Chill in there until the tow truck comes.”

Danny looks over the side of the truck bed and crinkles her nose, “It’s really dirty back there.”

“Duh,” he rolls his eyes and opens the back door to grab a blanket from the floor, “That’s why I have this.”
He steps around and opens the hatch, jumping up and laying the blanket on the floor. He turns around and offers Danny his hand, “Coming up?”

She looks like she’s trying not to smile and he tries not to match it. She finally grabs his hand and he pulls her up. Her foot catches the end of the hatch and he grabs her by the arms as she stumbles up. He grins, “Real graceful, Lawrence.”

“Shut up, Kirsch.”

He bites the inside of his lip and takes a seat against one side of the bed, pulling his notebook into his lap. She sits opposite of him and at the same time they both go to stretch their legs out, knocking into each other.

“Dude, cross your legs so I can stretch out.”

“Typical guy,” Danny scoffs, “Feeling entitled to the space around him.”

“No, typical Kirsch who just hates crossing his legs.” He nudges her leg, “Come on. Don’t make me beat you in the leg game for the spot.”

“The leg game?”

“Well, I don’t know the real name for it. But, you know when you match your feet up with someone and you kinda push on each other? It’s kind of like mercy but with your feet. The first person who’s foot slips or gives up is the loser.”

She shrugs, “I’ve never heard of that game.”

“What?” He leans forward, “I used to play it with Sarah all the time when we were kids.”

Danny picks at her laces, “I don’t have siblings so I never got that wonderful opportunity.” She looks at him, voice dripping with sarcasm, “What a shame.”

He waves her off and adjusts himself so that his feet are nudging hers, “No, dude, it’s actually really fun. Here.” He tries to push her feet so that they’re meeting the bottom of his shoes and she laughs.

“Kirsch, what the fuck are you doing?”

“Come on! I swear it’s actually kind of fun.”

The soles of their shoes finally meet and he starts to push against them, her knees buckling against her chest. He grins at her but she’s a quick study because she pushes back twice as hard, smirking at him, “You know I’m a track star, right?”

He furrows his brow in concentration and gives her some resistance, their feet hovering close to the middle space between them now. “Yeah, well. Football star, here.”

She barks a laugh, “That’s a stretch.”

“Whatever. My legs are like tree trunks.”

“Your legs are like twigs.”

“You’re never going to win.”

“I’ve never played this before and I know I’m still gonna kick your ass.”
“I can’t wait until you’re sitting like a little bitch cross-legged while I get to stretch out across the entire floor.”

“I can’t wait until you’re crying like a little fuck after losing your childhood game.”

“Dude, I don’t cry.”

“You will after this.”

He tries to jerk her foot to the side as a plan of surprise attack and it works - except when her foot loses balance it slips right off and flings forward to kick him right between the legs.

“Fuck,” he wheezes and rolls on the bed of the truck, “Jesus Christ, Danny.”

“Oh my God! Are you okay?” He groans some more as she keels over in laughter, “God, I wish I could say that I’m sorry but I don’t even think I am. Your face is so priceless right now that if I had the chance I’d do it again.”

“Jesus fuck, I’m just - give me a minute.” He’s cupping himself between his legs and squeezes his eyes shut, trying to ignore Danny’s loud laughter echoing around him.

“This is literally the best moment of my life.”

“I said just give me a minute.”

He blows out a breath and when he looks at her again she's looking at him with tears in her eyes, mouth pressed in a small smile and shoulders slightly shaking. He rolls his eyes, “Just keep going, don’t let my pain hold you back.”

She lets out another loud laugh and wipes at her eyes, “Okay, okay. I honestly am sorry. I hope I didn’t ruin your chances at having future children.”

He bristles, “Yeah, I’m sure I’ll be fine, asshole.” He picks himself back up and stretches out his legs, “You’re sitting crossed leg after that stunt.”

“It wasn’t on purpose.”

“I don’t care.”

She laughs and crosses her legs, “Fine. If you’re going to be a suck about it.”

“Danny, I saw my life flash before my eyes,” she starts another round of laughter and he reaches over to fling his notebook at her, “Just start taking notes, Lawrence.”

She nods and picks up the notebook, digging a pen out of her bag while she struggles to keep in her laughter.

“I really hate you today.”

She looks at him and smiles, “Don’t I know it.”

( Maybe if he says it enough times he’ll go back to actually feeling it.)

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Laura sighs loudly as she sinks into the couch cushion and sips on her beer. Ew. It’s really gross.
She tries to remember the tip LaFontaine gave her. Liquor before beer and you're in the clearing? No. That’s not it.

Beer before liquor you’re going to get sicker? Or is it never the sicker?

Whatever. She’ll just try to even out her drinks throughout the night to be safe.

She looks to her left and Kirsch is suddenly just - there. He stares at her with glossy eyes, "Hey babe."

“Have you ever had a sex dream about a friend?”

Kirsch spits out his drink, “Woah - warn a guy next time.”

Laura huffs. Her head is spinning too much to break things down, “Yes or no?”

“Uh,” he takes a large gulp with wide eyes, “That's kind of a personal question, Laura.”

She sulks into the couch, “Whatever. Big baby.”

“Dude, what the hell,” he makes a face, “Did you have a dream about me?”

“No,” she jerks forward and punches his shoulder. Ow. For some reason her hand hurts and he doesn’t look phased. She crinkles her nose, “Gross.”

He rolls his eyes and then something lights up on his face, “Is this about Carmilla?”

Laura lets out a booming laugh. Her sides hurt from laughing so much because this is probably the funniest thing she has ever heard in her life. Kirsch should really consider becoming a comedian because this is truly the best joke she has ever heard. *Carmilla*. Ha. She’s still laughing. It’s really so funny because it’s so far-fetched. Why would this be about Carmilla? Except she doesn’t actually remember what they’re talking about, now that she thinks about it.

His face softens, “Where is Carmilla tonight?”

Wow. Scratch that. Kirsch should not become a comedian because that was the most *unfunny* thing he has ever said.

She takes a big sip of her drink. Still gross. “I don’t care about Carmilla.”

His eyebrows shoot up, “First off, I asked where she was. Second, that’s bullshit.”

“You’re bullshit.”

She smiles. If Carmilla was here she would have laughed; she loves when Laura swears.

"Okay, you know what? I'm gonna go play beer pong or something," he hesitates, "Be careful, okay? Don't drink too much."

"I'm not a child. I know what to drink. Liquor before beer you are a deer. Or whatever."

Kirsch sighs as he shakes his head, walking over to join some Zetas in the kitchen.

Laura pouts. She's alone again. She's been alone all night because *someone* decided to go on a date. Which is completely fine, but like, now Laura is lonely.
Okay, so maybe people have been trying to talk to her all night. But that doesn't count.

She pulls out her phone and tries not to spill some of her beer - she fails - and re-reads her texts from earlier in the night.

**Laura (9:02pm):** hope you’re having so much fun

**Laura (9:02pm):** with elphaba

Laura stops to laugh at her phone. That was a good one.

**Laura (9:13pm):** this party is sooo oo o o o o o great

**Laura (9:18pm):** so o oo o much fun ur missing out

**Laura (9:21pm):** if u wanna come u still can theres enough room f or u

**Laura (9:29pm):** someone threw u p and it smell s bad but you always smell great

**Laura (10:23pm):** wish u were here

Her face heats up. She doesn’t remember sending that last one. She glances at the time now: 10:49pm. Okay. Maybe she should slow down a bit.

Or, she could just:

**Laura (10:50pm):** why aren’t you here

She cringes, her fingers moving faster than her brain, because if her brain could catch up it would be screaming *stop what you’re doing immediately.* She jumps in her seat at the feel of the vibration in her hand. That’s funny. She doesn’t remember clicking any vibrate button. Wait. That might mean a new message.

**Carm (10:52pm):** you look like such a hot mess right now

Laura squints at her screen. She holds the camera up to her face, whispering at the screen, “Can you see me? Am I on FaceTime?”

“Oh my God, how drunk are you?“

Laura looks up and immediately grins, “Carm.”

Carmilla gives her a small smile, “Didn’t answer my question, cupcake.”

“What are you doing here?”

Carmilla sighs and plops down next to her on the couch. Laura shifts so that her body is facing her, the edge of her knees pressing into Carmilla’s legs.

(She doesn’t mind.)

“I asked how drunk you were.”

“Oh,” Laura’s eyes widen and she leans forward, smiling around the edge of her cup and whispering, “I’m, like, kinda super drunk right now.” She frowns and leans back, “Wait. Why are you here?”
Carmilla shrugs and plucks Laura’s drink out of her hand, taking a large sip. Laura pouts as Carmilla licks the beer off of her lips.

(Shes ignores the tug she feels in her stomach at the sight of it.)

“You asked me to come, so.”

Laura smiles before she remembers exactly where Carmilla was before showing up here and hastily grabs her drink back. She leans back against the arm of the couch and stretches her legs out over Carmilla’s lap, taking a large sip of her drink, “So, how was your date with the Wicked Witch of the West?”

(Shes got to write that one down.)

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “You know her name is Elsie.”

“You can’t hold me responsible for anything I do tonight - I’m drunk.”

“Laura, you’ve been calling her Elphaba all week.”

Laura giggles, “Tomato, potato.”

“That’s-” Carmilla runs a hand through her hair. She’s gorgeous tonight. “Nevermind.”

Laura reaches up and plays with a piece of Carmilla’s hair, “Do you ever think about kissing?”

Carmilla pales. Laura wonders how she’s still so gorgeous. Maybe it’s the lights of the party.

“Um, not really any more than the norm.”

Laura sighs dramatically and throws her head back, staring at the ceiling, “Kissing is such a strange thing. One minute you’re doing it and then the next you’re not. And you might want to try again but then is that even possible? Do I need to be sleeping?”

She stares at the stucco on the ceiling and pretends they’re constellations. Carmilla loves the stars - she probably knows all the names of them. She’s just that smart. She feels a few pats on her legs and she looks back at Carmilla, “What?”

“I had asked you if you’re feeling alright. But then you zoned out. So I’m going to take that as a no.”

Laura scowls, “I’m fine.”

Which, she really is. She’s been feeling great today. Well, maybe not entirely great - but the moment Carmilla showed up she’s been feeling magical. Carmilla tends to have that effect on her.

“What ever you say, cupcake.”

Carmilla is right. Maybe she can say whatever she wants to say, “Actually, I want to talk to you about something.”

Carmilla furrows her brow and nods, reaching forward to grab Laura’s drink from her hand and placing it on the floor. Laura pouts but Carmilla gives her a look, “You were this close to spilling it.”

Laura grins, “You’re so thoughtful. And such a softie. Like a soft pillow.” Laura’s eyes light up and she shifts forward so that she’s side-sitting on Carmilla’s lap. She wraps her arms around her shoulders and nuzzles into Carmilla’s neck, “Now you’re like a real human pillow.”
She feels Carmilla laugh into her hair, “Laura, you wanted to tell me something.”

“Right, right.” Laura pulls back and suddenly Carmilla’s face is just there. Right in front of her. And on her face are her lips. She’s staring and she remembers what it felt like to taste them; even though it was a dream it doesn’t seem like her memory seems to mind. Maybe she could just lean forward. Try again. She’s basically in the same position, and that thought heats her cheeks and sends a sinking feeling to the bottom of her stomach.

“Laura, are you okay?”

“I think I don’t feel so well.”

Carmilla frowns and reaches up to run her fingers through Laura’s hair. Laura closes her eyes and leans into it, “Come on, buttercup. I can take you home, okay?”

Laura nods and leans forward, pressing a sloppy kiss on Carmilla’s jaw before pulling back, “Thank you. You’re like a party angel.”

(Carmilla looks like she wants to frown and a sadness settles itself in Laura’s chest.)

“Alright, lush,” Carmilla pats Laura’s legs again, “I need you up so we can get going.”

Laura whines for a second and then rolls off of Carmilla onto the floor. She can hear her let out a laugh and feels warm knowing that it was her that caused it. Carmilla reaches down and pulls Laura up by the hand. When she laces their fingers together Laura closes her eyes, smiling at how right it feels.

(They’re like two puzzle pieces.)

She opens her eyes when she feels the cool night air hit her. She lets go of Carmilla’s hand to rub up and down her arms. Carmilla looks at her and frowns, shrugging out of her leather jacket.

“Here,” Carmilla puts it around her shoulders and rubs up and down Laura’s arms, “Better?”

The moon lights up Carmilla’s face. She’s stunning. “I’m always better with you.”

(A slow smile breaks out on Carmilla’s face; Laura’s heart picks up a few paces.)

“Come on, you drunk. Let’s get you home before you say some other ridiculous shit.”

Laura reaches out and laces their hands again. It calms something in her chest.

It takes ten minutes for her to puff out a sigh, “Carm, I’m tired.”

Carmilla laughs, “We only have about ten minutes to go. You can do this.”

“But,” she slumps her shoulders and swings their arms back and forth between them, “I just wanna be in my bed.”

They suddenly stop and Carmilla looks at her with a curious expression. It makes Laura’s heart race some more. Her head is spinning until Carmilla is suddenly shorter than her.

“Woah, I just got really tall.”

Carmilla looks at her over her shoulder and rolls her eyes, “I’m crouching down, Jesus Christ.”
Laura laughs, “Oh. Why are you down there?”

“Giving you a free ride home,” she pats her back a few times, “Come on, all aboard.”

“Oh my God,” Laura giggles and closes her eyes, the dizziness getting to her head. She braces herself on Carmilla’s shoulder as she feels a cool hand cover hers.

“You okay?”

Laura nods, “Yeah, it’s just - the world is spinning.”

Carmilla rubs her hand over Laura’s, “It won’t spin so much on my back.” Carmilla crouches down a bit further, “Come on, I know you’re like three feet tall but if I go down any lower I’ll be lying on the ground.”

“Am I three feet tall? I’ll have to ask the doctor at my next checkup.”

“Laura,” Carmilla huffs, “Come on, you can do this.”

Laura reaches forward to brace her arms on Carmilla’s shoulders but the jacket keeps threatening to fall off.

“You’re like, a genius.”

Laura steps back and slides her arms in. When she tries to hold onto Carmilla’s shoulders again it stays in place, “You’re like, a genius.”

Carmilla doesn’t say anything to that and Laura concentrates hard on hoisting herself on Carmilla’s back. After a few tries she’s gets it, wrapping her arms tightly around Carmilla’s neck as Laura feels Carmilla hook her arms under her knees.

“Do you mind loosening your arms a little? I won’t be able to get us there if you choke me to death.”

Laura immediately slackens her hold. Carmilla dying would be the worse thing in the world. She feels tears prick the corner of her eyes and buries her head in Carmilla’s neck, “Please don’t die.”

“I’ll try my hardest, cupcake.”

The walk is silent for a while and Laura takes the time to breathe in Carmilla’s perfume and trace patterns on her collarbones. They walk past a girl with blonde hair and Laura scowls.

“You never told me about your date.”

Carmilla sighs, “It wasn’t really a date.”

Laura pulls her head up and tries to move forward to see Carmilla’s face. She can’t at that angle so she settles for resting her chin on her shoulder, “I thought it was.”

“I don’t know. Maybe it was supposed to be. But when I was there it just didn’t feel...right.”

Laura bites her lip and smiles. Something in her chest feels like it’s swelling and if she closes her eyes she can pretend she’s flying.

(She’s going up, up, up.)
“We, uh,” Carmilla shifts her arms to adjust their place under Laura’s knees, “We kissed, though.”

An icy coolness washes over Laura’s body. Her stomach twists and pushes up a lump to the back of her throat, a throbbing burn settling itself there. If she was flying before, then her body definitely feels like it’s in a free fall now, the weight in the pit of her stomach dragging her down.

(She’s falling down, down, down.)

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

Laura clenches her eyes shut and buries her face in Carmilla’s neck again. She focuses on the smell of orchids and pushes away imagines of Elsie getting to feel the lips that she once got to taste. Well, not technically. Because Elsie got to have Carmilla in real life and she only got a dream. Laura shakes her head a bit and blows out a breath. She should be happy for Carmilla and her head is spinning too much to understand why she feels sick to her stomach right now.

(Should she stop drinking, maybe.)

“Laura, are you crying?”

Laura stills, “No.”

Carmilla slows down, “I can feel it against my neck.”

“It’s um,” she grips tight with one arm as the other wipes her face, “It’s probably the wind. You’re going too fast.”

“I’m probably going the speed of a turtle.”

“You’re a very fast turtle.”

She goes back to Carmilla’s neck and wonders if Elsie got to kiss her there. It’s a beautiful neck and Elsie would be ridiculous not to have tried. Laura finds a few beauty marks and thinks about constellations again - thinks about the stars and Carmilla and orchids.

She leans forward and presses her lips against one of them.

“Laura.”

She presses another kiss to it - and then two more slow kisses to the other marks, connecting the constellation.

“You’re like the galaxy.”

“Laura, you’re drunk.”

There’s a warning tone to her voice and Laura sighs, “Yeah, I am, aren’t I?”

“Just,” Carmilla pauses, “I’m gonna get you home really soon, okay?”

“Okay. Thanks, Carm.”

Laura closes her eyes and tries to nap before they get to her house.
Maybe she’ll have another good dream.

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Perry giggles into the kiss, “Babe, I have,” she shifts and LaFontaine takes the opportunity to start kissing her neck, “Seriously, I have a hanger stuck in my shoulder.”

LaFontaine laughs into her neck, “Oh my God, sorry - here.” They step back to give her some room and knock into the door. They both burst into a fit of laughter as LaFontaine rubs the back of their head.

“This isn’t the most convenient place to make out, is it?”

LaFontaine smiles and leans forward to press a quick kiss against Perry’s lips, “We can make it work.”

They grab Perry by the waist and turn them around, pressing her into the door. They trail kisses up her jaw until they get back to her mouth. They hum into Perry’s mouth when they feel her take their lip between her teeth.

Perry reaches up to cup the back of their neck, scratching lightly, “I love you.”

It sends a pain to their chest; not the usual good kind - the kind that feels like a dull blade.

“I love you, too. So much.”

They press forward before she can say anymore. Every word that passes their lips lately feels sour in their mouth and they just need a moment to forget.

(About what? Everything, really.)

Perry grips the back of their head as they press her harder into the door. They pick up the pace, deepening the kiss and reaching up to pull lightly on the back of Perry’s hair.

Perry stills them with hands on their shoulders, “Hey, hey - are you okay?”

No. Not at all. “Yeah, are you?”

“Yes, of course. You just seem - different.”

Their heart races and for a second they’re worried Perry will be able to hear it because it’s beating so loudly. “I’m good. I just really wanna kiss you.”

They lean forward and Perry smiles into the kiss, but she nudges her face to the side. “I just have this feeling.”

LaFontaine kisses along her jaw, “That feeling is love. Roll with it.”

Perry laughs. Good, it means she’s going to drop it soon.

“You’re such a dork. But you’re my dork.”

They pull back suddenly, trying to search Perry’s eyes in the dark. Their entire chest burns and they feel like someone is gripping their heart, “I am yours, Perr. Honestly.”

Perry makes a comforting noise in the back of her throat and gives them a quick kiss, “Of course you
“I know, but - I just wanted you to know.”

“And I do.”

LaFontaine leans into Perry as she wraps her arms around them, trying to pull them as close as possible. They rest their head on Perry’s shoulder, focusing on the calming patterns she draws on their back. They closes their eyes and smile.

With their eyes closed, they can pretend everything is okay.

(This seems to be their plan lately.)

“Babe, come on, it’s a little more private in here.”

LaFontaine freezes against Perry’s chest, their heart pounding. They can hear a guy and girl in the room and LaFontaine whispers into Perry’s shoulder, “Fuck, fuck fuck.”

“Just be quiet. They’ll leave soon.”

They wait a few minutes - LaFontaine feeling like their heart is in their throat - before the girl complains about wanting to find her friends. After waiting in silence for another couple of minutes to make sure the room is empty they both let out a sigh of relief.

“That was close, LaF. We should have locked the door when we first got inside the room. Or maybe just stuck with the bathroom.”

“I know, I know, but - I’m so sick of making out in bathrooms at parties. They’re so gross.”

“Yeah, me too. And this is a slightly nice change but we’re just,” Perry sighs, “We’re literally kissing in a closet. I can’t even begin to explain the irony right now.”

(She doesn’t have to tell them. They know.)

“I know. I’m sorry.”

They don’t have to be able to see Perry’s face to know that she’s frowning. “Sweetie, it’s not your fault.”

“Yeah, but - if I was different - or if my parents were - Perr, there’s just so much that could be easier if you didn’t have to deal with me.”

The air is still and tense; LaFontaine ignores the pound of their pulse loud and persistent in their ear.

“LaFontaine?”

They sigh, “Yes?”

“Shut the fuck up.” They can’t stop the laugh - Perry rarely swears unless she’s rapping or extremely offended - and they breathe a little easier. “We are closeted together, remember? It’s not just you - it’s my parents, too. So we’re in this together, okay?”

“Yeah, I know, but-”

“No, no but’s. Listen, if we had the chance to have an out relationship we would take it, right?”
Their ears burn, “I guess.”

“Honey, I know we would. And I wish there was some sort of way to ease your stress, and if there was I would give the world to make it happen. I would support it.”

She needs to stop - stop saying that, stop saying the perfect things.

(They don’t deserve it. Not then and not now.)

“But until then, we just keep getting through this together, okay?”

The words burn, “Yeah, together.”

Being together never felt so alone.

(They wouldn’t feel that way if they just stopping doing everything by themself.)

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danny L (10:31pm): what's wrong w ith you

Kirsch (10:37pm): wat do u mean

danny L (10:41pm): you've been staring at me all night

Kirsch (10:46pm): u a n f ur friends R hot i guess idk

Kirsch (11:10pm): were u staring at me 2

Kirsch (11:11pm): make a wish

-----

“My key is hiding from me again.”

Carmilla sighs through a smile, “Laura, you’re checking my jacket pockets. It’s probably in your jeans.”

Laura nods and pulls her hands out, reaching down and checking her jean pockets. She grins wide; Carmilla’s heart soars.

“I found it!”

Carmilla laughs softly, putting a hand over Laura’s mouth and shushing her, “You’re going to wake up your dad.” She feels a cool tongue against her hand and grimaces, pulling it away, “Laura, that’s gross.”

She smiles wider and Carmilla suddenly doesn’t mind so much.

“Sorry, I just got excited that you knew where it was. You’re, like, psychic.”

“Yeah, that prediction will cost you $20.”

Laura looks terrified, “Carmilla, I don’t have any money on me.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “It’s a joke. Here,” she grabs the key and unlocks the door, pausing before
opening to look at Laura with a serious face, “When we go inside we’re going straight up to your room. No talking until we are in your room and I’ve locked the door, okay?”

Laura nods at her with wide eyes. Carmilla offers her a reassuring smile before opening the door and grabbing Laura’s hand. They tip-toe up the stairs and luckily Laura remains quiet the entire time. She stumbles a bit on the final step but Carmilla is able to catch her before she makes too much noise.

Carmilla closes the door behind them and quickly locks it.

"This looks like my room."

"Laura, it is your room."

"Oh, well that's convenient."

Carmilla bites the inside of her lip and shakes her head. "Um, I'm going to grab you some stuff to wear to bed." She walks to Laura's dresser and rummages through the drawers until she finds Laura's favourite worn in Doctor Who shirt and a pair of shorts.

"Carm, I'm cold."

When she turns around she feels her face flush at the sight of Laura in nothing but her shirt, the leather jacket and her jeans pooled around her ankles.

"Oh my God," Carmilla rushes forward and shoves Laura's clothes into her chest, keeping her eyes steady on Laura's face, "Just - take these into the bathroom and get changed. I'm going to sneak downstairs and get you some toast."

Laura shakes her head, "No, I'm not hungry."

"I know, but we need to soak up all of that fucking beer." She moves some hair out of Laura's face, "How much did you drink, anyway?"

Laura shrugs, "Two beers. Maybe three."

Carmilla snorts, "You're such a lightweight."

Laura shifts and hugs herself, looking down, "I am not."

"Okay, sure. Just get changed and I'll be back with some food, okay?"

She moves to turn but there's a tight grip on her wrist. She turns back and Laura is looking at her with shiny eyes, "Please, I'm not really hungry and I-" she squeezes Carmilla’s wrist again, "My stomach hurts and the room is spinning so - just please don’t leave me."

Carmilla’s chest aches, “I don’t want you to get sick.”

“I won’t. I promise.”

She looks like she’s on the verge of tears and with all the mixed signals Laura has been throwing her way this night she doesn’t have it in her to see that right now. She nods, “Okay, fine. But go get changed so I can tuck you in and then head home. I know since you’re drunk as fuck time is probably infinite, but it’s actually really late right now.”

Laura’s eyes widen, “Carm, you can’t-”
Laura loosens her grip on Carmilla’s wrist and slides her hand down to lace their fingers. She shuffles forward - it’s a miracle she doesn’t trip over those jeans - and brings her other hand up to hook her finger in Carmilla’s belt loop, pulling her close, “Please - stay the night?”

Carmilla’s breath picks up. She tries not to focus on the fact that Laura is inches away from her face with her pants to the ground. Her mouth is dry so she licks her lips, “Okay.”

Laura beams at her, leaning on the tips of her toes to press a lingering kiss to her cheek, “Thank you.”

“It’s, uh, nothing. But - seriously - can you please put some clothes on?”

Laura giggles and steps forward and - yeah, okay, not so much of a miracle anymore because she almost completely trips over herself. Carmilla steadies her and helps her walk over to the bed. Laura looks up at her with sad eyes as she flops down onto the edge of her mattress, “Can you help me?”

Carmilla takes a steady breath and stares up, counting backwards from ten. She would never try anything but she is also in a bedroom alone with the girl she’s head over heels for who also happens to be half naked.

(Shes must have the worst karma in the world.)

She kneels down and keeps her eyes trained on Laura’s ankles as she tries to unroll the jeans off of her feet. Laura keeps trying to poke Carmilla’s arm with her other foot, “Laura.”

Laura laughs, “Sorry.”

She manages to get the jeans off and throws them across the room, reaching for the pair of shorts and getting them on as quick as she can. She reaches up and helps Laura shrug out of the jacket. When Laura’s arms are free, she reaches forward and runs them through Carmilla’s hair, “Your hair is like silk, I think.”

“I made it myself. I’m actually a caterpillar.”

Laura parts her lips, “Woah. That’s amazing.” She scrunches her face and tilts her head, “Wait, you’re joking with me, aren’t you?”

Carmilla taps her nose, “You’re too smart for me, cutie.”

She grabs the sleep shirt and tugs at the bottom of Laura’s shirt, “Can you take this off yourself?” With a pout Laura shakes her head no and Carmilla sighs, “Okay. Lift up your arms.”

Laura lifts them up and wiggles her fingers, letting out a tiny squeal. Carmilla laughs and hushes her, “Seriously, your dad is going to kill us.”

Laura clamps down on her mouth and Carmilla pulls her shirt up and over her head. She keeps her eyes trained on the shirt in her hand, fumbling a little bit, before Laura whispers, “What was it like to kiss her?”

It was strange. It was new. It was different.

(It wasn’t you.)

She settles for, “It wasn’t anything special.”
“Really?”

Carmilla finally tears her eyes away from the shirt to look Laura in the eye. There’s something about her tone - almost relieved - that gets her attention.

She nods and gulps because - yeah, Laura is still sitting there in just a sports bra and shorts, “Yeah.”

Laura smiles at her, “Good.”

Carmilla furrows her brow, but shrugs it off. Laura is drunk - she’s been making no sense all night. She fits the shirt over Laura’s head and smooths out some wrinkles on her shoulders. She doesn’t trust looking Laura in the eyes right now so she takes a step back and stands up, “There you go. I’m gonna grab some sweats to change into,”

Carmilla changes in the dark while Laura crawls under the covers. She moves back to the bed and gets in under the sheets on her side of the bed. Laura turns to her, whispering out, “I know I usually hold you, but - do you mind holding me tonight? It’s been kind of a long week.”

Carmilla frowns in the dark and opens her arms, letting Laura settle against her chest. She closes her eyes and lets that warm feeling inside of her at the feel of Laura’s breath against her skin.

Laura’s breathing is evening out and she feels safe to fall asleep when Carmilla feels hot air breathed against her collarbone: “I think I like girls.”

(Well, shit.)

-----

“Ugh,” Laura groans into her pillow and clenches her eyes shut. If she forces herself back to sleep maybe her head will stop pounding. She moves her hand around the bed and feels cool sheets. She frowns into fabric, “Carm?”

“Hey,” the voice sounds far, “Are you waking up?” Good, she’s closer now.

“Why are you up so early?”

“Well, I do admit 11am is pretty early for me.”

Laura squints one eye open and looks at Carmilla looking down at her from beside her on the bed, “It’s 11?”

Carmilla nods, “Afraid so.”

“Oh my God,” she rolls over and then winces - that was way too fast - before covering her eyes with her hand, “I never sleep in this much.”

“If it makes you feel better, you woke up a bit around 7 because you thought you were going to throw up.”

“Oh my God,” she’s probably going to say that a lot this morning. “I’m sorry for waking you up.”

Carmilla waves it off, “I was already awake, don’t worry.”

Laurapeeks at her through her fingers, “You were awake?”

“Uh, yeah,” Carmilla avoids her eyes and picks at the sheets, “I set an alarm because you’d probably
wake up early from being dehydrated, and I didn’t want you to go through that alone in case you were sick or something.”

Laura is glad her hand is covering her face because she feels her cheeks heating up and fast. She groans again and rolls closer to Carmilla, burying her face in the other pillow, “Oh man, I’m sorry you had to do that.”

“It’s okay, cupcake. I’m just happy you’re okay.”

“Okay is a very relative term.”

Carmilla laughs and Laura thinks that it might be the start of her hangover cure, because the knots in the bottom of her stomach start to loosen up a bit at the sound of it.

“I - I mean, if you’re feeling up for it - I made you some mac and cheese while you were sleeping.”

Laura looks up at her and blows out a sigh, a small smile growing on her lips, “You’re incredibly sweet. It’s like you’re not even trying to hide it anymore.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, “Whatever. I was up since 6:30. Sue me if I had nothing better to do.”

Laura winces, “Does my dad know?”

“I told him that you were working on a huge project and hibernating until you finished, so he was okay with me bringing up a bowl of it for you,” she gestures to the nightstand behind her and then turns to Laura with a frown, “It’s, uh, probably cold by now - I can go heat it up if you want-”

Carmilla shifts to get up but Laura wraps an arm around her waist, “No, stay. Please.” It doesn’t take much more than that because Carmilla adjusts herself so that she’s back on the bed. Laura moves a little so Carmilla can lie against the headboard before Laura brings her arm back around her waist and cuddles into her side. “You’re like my human pillow.” Carmilla snorts at that and after a few seconds it turns into a full-blown laugh. Laura frowns, “What?”

“It’s just - you said something like that when you were drunk last night.”

Laura’s eyes go wide. Oh God, the party. She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, trying to remember as much as she can.

(beer. stars. leather. orchids. flying. tears. silk.)

“Um, did you give me a piggyback ride?”

“Yup.”

“Oh God, and - Elphaba? Did I say that again?”

“Yes, but you’ve had no problems saying it sober so there’s no need to be embarrassed about that one.”

Her face flushes and she settles further into Carmilla, “Right. Sorry. Um, from what I remember your date didn’t go that well. So, uh, sorry for that, too.”

It’s not entirely truthful, but for all Carmilla did for her last night she deserves a good friend right now.

Carmilla shrugs against her, “It’s not that big a deal. Some things just aren’t meant to be.”
Laura tries to remember the last time she believed in things like fate and destiny, but all she’s hit with are images that are a bit too heavy for a morning hangover.

(A black dress. Flowers. A tombstone.)

But maybe Carmilla is right. Maybe she’s meant for someone else.

And on the subject of maybe’s, maybe Laura isn’t remembering the night right, because maybe Carmilla didn’t actually kiss Elsie when they were on their almost-date.

But she has to know for sure: “And - you guys kissed, right?”

“Yeah. We did. Before you ask, it was whatever. We don’t have to make a big deal out of it.”

It suddenly feels like her dad raised the thermostat. “I wasn’t going to.”

“Right.”

The air is heavy again, and Laura is starting to feel her chest tighten a bit at the thought of the other possible things she might have said, “Did I mention anything about any dreams last night?”

“You said a lot of ridiculous things last night.”

“Yeah, but - about any dreams?”

Carmilla looks down and moves some hair from in front of her eyes, “You scared you confessed your deepest, darkest secrets to me, cutie?”

Yes. “No.” She lets out a laugh. It’s hollow. “Of course not.”

Carmilla gives her that patented sad smile and nods, “Alright.” She looks over at the nightstand, “Are you sure you don’t want me to heat up that mac and cheese? It won’t take me long.”

Laura shakes her head. There are too many knots in her stomach to even think about food right now, “I’m good. Thank you for making it, though. I promise to eat some of it later when I’m feeling a bit better.”

“Okay,” Carmilla yawns a few times, “Sounds good.”

“Here,” Laura moves back a bit and tugs lightly on Carmilla’s waist, “Come take a nap with me. We can wake up later and watch crappy movies for the rest of the afternoon.”

Carmillla gives her a lazy smile - her eyes are already half closed - and nods, “Okay.”

Carmilla is facing her and Laura would turn around but she’s just so beautiful. Instead, she hooks her arm under Carmilla’s and pulls her close, tangling their legs together. It feels like they’re hugging lying down, and Laura is okay with that because Carmilla’s hugs are one of her favourite things in this entire world.

“I really like this.”

Carmilla shifts forward and their foreheads meet. Laura feels like she should maybe move back but her heart is beating really fast and that swoop in the bottom of her stomach is telling her to stay put.

Carmilla sighs out, “I really like this, too.”
At this point, Laura is about ninety percent certain that she likes girls - that she’s gay - and that she would really like to know what kissing a girl feels like in real life. Her heart skips just at the thought and she thinks that maybe her cheeks are heated up enough for Carmilla to feel it.

(Shé’s so close to her.)

She could lean forward and press their lips quickly - just to try - but that’s not fair to Carmilla. Her foggy hungover brain doesn’t get the memo, though, because she still moves forward and luckily hits her cheek, barely off the corner of Carmilla’s mouth.

“Um, goodnight. I mean, good afternoon - but for sleeping.”

(God, she is so uncool.)

Carmilla’s eyes are peacefully closed, but she gives one of Laura’s favourite kind of smiles: the one where she looks undeniably and irrevocably happy.

Laura frowns. She wonders if they should stop this kind of stuff since she’s starting to like girls. It’s more the kind of stuff that girlfriends do together, which was fine before when she didn’t like girls, but now that she does and the possibility that they could actually be girlfriends is real, well - the idea almost sends a thrill up her spine.

(Shé blames it on the hangover. Her feelings are all over the place this morning, apparently.)

But, for now, she’s just going to focus on sleeping and using the power of her mind to will this hangover to go away. She pulls Carmilla closer and clutches on her shirt a bit tighter.

(Shé’ll just let herself enjoy this now, while she still can.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.

Fool's Gold updates every Tuesday & Thursday, 5-6PM EST. Fool's Gold will begin to update ONCE A WEEK on FRIDAYS 5-6PM EST starting on FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6TH.
Find Another One

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 16, or the one where Laura Hollis is cuter than anyone in the entire world, end of story.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Drugs

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**My Person <3 (7:02am):** are you wearing the green turtleneck or the yellow one?

**Care Perr (7:03am):** the yellow

**My Person <3 (7:03am):** sweet, i’ll wear the green. can i borrow a pair of shoes? none of mine really say ‘fashion disaster’

**Care Perr (7:05am):** should i be insulted that we’re only wearing my clothes on a day specifically designated for horrible fashion?

**My Person <3 (7:07am):** yikes

—

They almost don’t make it to the cafeteria without getting completely drenched. Silas has an outdoor campus, and it almost never rains this hard, but because God truly hates Danny Lawrence, they get a good forty days and forty nights worth of rain by noon on Monday.

On the day that she decides to wear a white shirt. Nice.

She and Laura nearly trip over each other as they duck inside the cafeteria, where LaFontaine and Perry have already claimed their usual spot.

“Oh, crap.” Laura’s shoulders slump and she pouts the moment she sees them.

Danny drops her backpack on the table. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s spirit day, isn’t it?”

She wonders if she should be insulted that Laura thought she was wearing kaleidoscope yoga pants and crocs just for the hell of it.

LaFontaine and Perry start to laugh — they’re dressed in some of Perry’s worst turtlenecks, jean shorts, and Laura probably can’t see them underneath the lunch table, but Danny is pretty sure they’re both wearing cowboy boots. “Uh, yeah,” LaF glances at all of their outfits. “Spirit week —
did you not get the memo? Monday is fashion disaster day.”

Laura still hasn’t set her things down, but she groans. “Crap, that means homecoming is this week.”

Laura forgetting about homecoming is about on the same level as Perry forgetting about a homework assignment, so Danny has to double check that the Earth isn’t actively tilting on its axis.

“Since when do you forget about the homecoming dance?”

LaFontaine raises an eyebrow at Perry and looks behind Laura to see Carmilla slipping into the cafeteria. “Yeah, what’s been on your mind, L?”

“Me? What— nothing, I...” She jumps when Carmilla puts a hand on her back and offers her a crooked smile, and it’s kind of gross how obvious they are.

“Hey.”

“Hi.”

Danny and LaFontaine roll their eyes together while Perry pays a respectable amount of attention to the pair before returning to the sandwich in front of her with a polite smile. Laura sits down first, and Carmilla slides in next to her. They all eat together now, even if Carmilla seems to only have eyes or ears for Laura — predictable. Danny doesn’t really understand how Laura is the only person who can’t see how into her Carmilla is.

She’s pretty sure even Mr. Beckett knows at this point.

LaFontaine rips into a bag of Sun Chips. “Have you even gotten your homecoming tickets yet?”

“I haven’t even gotten my dress yet.”

Danny scoffs. “Hey, relax, at least you don’t have to go an hour and a half out of town to find a store that even sells dresses for people as tall as me.”

“Good point.” Laura nods.

Carmilla looks like she’s about to say something, and Danny is seriously going to throw a milk carton at her if she makes a comment about her height.

(Mostly because she’s always wanted an excuse to throw a milk carton at her. She could care less about her height.)

She doesn’t say anything, though, only frowning a little when LaFontaine points to the other side of the cafeteria. “They’re selling the tickets by the vending machines.”

Laura turns in her seat to look at the booth. “I actually have some cash on me right now, Carm. Do you wanna go buy tickets with me?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes. “I’m sorry, what exactly made you think I enjoy the idea of standing with a hundred sweaty teenagers in a gymnasium while they blast Top 40 crap on cheap speakers for three hours? I have better things to do.”

Danny is pretty sure she must have had that one thought up for a while, because there’s no way Carmilla can come up with that much sarcastic shit on the fly without some kind of rehearsal.

“C’mon,” Laura whines. “It would be so much fun.”
For once, Danny actually feels a little bad for Carmilla because Laura really needs to control what
she says sometimes.

“No can do, sundance.”

Laura pouts, actually *pouts*, and Carmilla just smiles and pulls a book from her bag.

(Danny doesn’t buy it for a second.)

—

**Laura** (6:42am): *btw don’t forget its spirit day today.*

**Laura** (6:42am): *tuesday is pajama day!!*

**Carm** (6:42am): *trust me i know*

**Carm** (6:43am): *will is wearing funny bottoms to school*

**Carm** (6:43am): *why do funny bottoms even exist*

**Carm** (6:44am): *for the record, he’s adopted. im definitely not related to anybody who wears funny bottoms.*

**Carm** (6:45am): *if you wear funny bottoms im not going to be seen with you in public today*

**Laura** (7:22am): *sorry haha i was in the shower*

**Laura** (7:24am): *sidetone, you said funny bottoms four times before 7am im not gonna forget that anytime soon*

—

There’s a bench by the bus loop that LaFontaine has sat at for two and a half years now. Or two and
a quarter, whatever. They don’t feel like doing the math. It’s across from the parking lot, where
LaFontaine drops off Perry before they search for a parking spot, which isn’t always a guarantee,
since this parking lot is closest to the main building. She buys them something from the vending
machine while they park, and they sit at the same red bench together that they have for years now.

Except for today. And the last few weeks, in general. Because that bench is starting to get a little
crowded.

Sometimes Danny comes by, sometimes Kirsch comes by, and sometimes they both come by; it’s
kind of an interesting development that nobody saw coming, but at the same time nobody is really
surprised by it. Danny takes Perry’s spot when she stands to get them a chocolate milk from the caf’s
breakfast line, since the vending machines were out.

Laura and Carmilla pile off of the bus together, already bickering, and it kind of reminds LaFontaine
of Perry and them back in freshman year.

“I texted you like *four* times last night telling you it was pajama day.”

Carmilla shrugs, but she’s smiling — and LaFontaine suspects it’s only partly due to the plaid pajama
bottoms and Doctor Who t-shirt that Laura is wearing. And the polar bear slippers. Only Laura
would have polar bear slippers.
“Just because you texted me, doesn’t mean I agreed to it.”

LaFontaine and Danny scoot further down the bench to make room for Laura and Carmilla.

“What, are you too cool to wear your pajamas? They’re like, the least embarrassing pajamas on earth.”

“You’re already wearing the shirt I usually wear to bed.”

Danny looks at LaFontaine and they both raise their eyebrows while Laura and Carmilla continue to bicker. It’s lucky for LaFontaine that Perry is still in the cafeteria and that Kirsch shows up to talk about something — either football or homecoming, they aren’t really paying attention, because their phone vibrates and they have a text from JP.

**JP (8:14am):** yo bad news (ish?) the guy who usually hooks me up during the week isn’t gonna be able to get me anything more til next week. soooo idk if you needed anything this week but ya.

**JP (8:14am):** also i dont mean to judge or anything but you seem to be going through this stuff kinda fast. everything ok?

They don’t have time to really think about it, because they’re surrounded by their friends and it’s bad enough feeling like a wreck when they’re on their own, but this... this is just cruel. Falling apart in a group of people who are all too put together is the kind of thing that started this entire mess.

No, it’s not a mess, though. Not completely. It’s still early in the game, they can still handle this.

Perry is back in less than a minute, and Danny and Kirsch walk off together. They don’t bother to ask why, but pocket their phone to take the chocolate milk that Perry offers.

They do have a plan, and maybe it’s not the best one, but it’s solid. They’ll deal with it soon. After school, probably. Even if they had said they wouldn’t go down that road.

(LaFontaine has sworn they wouldn’t. But it’s not like life is really giving them a choice.)

—

Laura says goodbye to her by the lockers, like they always do after sixth period, but it’s awkward. Again. She’s pretty much made a habit these days of making everything *painfully* awkward when it comes to Carmilla. She offers her a little wave and slumps against the lockers the moment that she turns the corner.

Everything is just kind of... messy. And confusing. With the dream, and Elsie, and the party, and the morning after the party, and the fact that she’s *gay* and somehow never even noticed. How did she not even know her own sexuality? How does that slip past *anyone*? Plus, she still hasn’t told anybody yet, and that just makes everything feel even messier.

But mostly Carmilla. Carmilla is messy. Laura is a mess. This entire situation is messy. The word ‘messy’ is starting to lose meaning.

LaFontaine leans back against the lockers with her. “What’s up, Frosh?”

“I’m a sophomore now, you’re not allowed to call me that anymore.”

“Yeah, I know, but you’re always gonna be the little Frosh I took under my wing.” They say with a laugh and Laura is kind of glad she has this. Even if this feels a little messy, too. She should be able
to tell LaFontaine, of all people.

“You’re looking significantly more spirited today.”

“Yeah, well, you know I love spirit week.” Laura pushes herself off the lockers and LaFontaine follows, since the bell is going to ring any minute now and the band room is halfway across the campus. “And I blame the party on Saturday for throwing me off yesterday. I think I was still a little hungover. Is that even possible?”

“Probably not.”

“Yeah, tell that to my brain.” She really felt like crap on Sunday.

“Did you get in trouble with your Dad?”

“No, thank God. Carm actually helped me to my room and everything, she was... really sweet.” She’d been surprisingly tolerant for somebody who Laura had treated like crap over the whole Elsie thing. She’s still totally embarrassed by the way she acted. Calling Elsie the wrong name on purpose was probably a step too far, but Laura has never been great with handling rejection. Not that it was rejection — just, she isn’t sure what exactly, but there has to be a reason that she was jealous. Her Dad always told her to trust her gut, and her gut said that there was a perfectly reasonable excuse to dislike Elsie.

Still. She acted like a jealous ex or something. And Carmilla had been sweet and perfect and helped her to her room. And made sure that she didn’t get caught. And gotten up early on a Sunday to take care of her. And made her mac and cheese, and fallen asleep with her again when they got tired, and basically she was perfect and Laura had been completely stupid. And drunk. Maybe she could blame it on the alcohol?

“L? You there?” LaFontaine waves a hand in front of Laura’s face.

“What, sorry?”

“I asked if there was any particular reason you look like me when I talk about Perry. I’m starting to see why everybody is so disgusted by us.”

“Well, yeah, I mean she’s my best friend.” Her face is definitely heating up, so Laura pretends to check her phone. “Perry’s your best friend.”

“Perry’s my—” They must have remembered where they are, because they drop their voice to a whisper. “You know what Perry is to me.”

Laura puts her phone away and looks at them to say, as genuinely as she can, “She’s my best friend.”

(She’s not sure why it’s hard to say. Whatever, things are messy.)

Honestly, before she can think about any of this, she needs to tell somebody what she’s feeling. What she knows about herself. She doesn’t know why it’s so hard to say it. She could just tell them. Two words said in the middle of a hallway of a semi-liberal school, it’s not like she has to worry about backlash, and especially not from LaFontaine. Two little words that are probably the truest thing she knows right now, no matter how complicated it makes things.

I’m gay.
Two easy words, but she doesn’t say them. She can almost hear LaFontaine’s chuckle. She can hear their casual “duh” or “I’m not surprised” and honestly? It doesn’t feel fair. Looking back at everything, she’s pretty sure the only person she can tell is Carmilla.

(Ha, good one, Laura.)

“I’m sorry, have you not noticed that she has a major crush on you?”

“Wait, wait, wait. What?”

Not what she was expecting. In fact, that’s completely the exact opposite of what she was expecting.

“Carmilla? No way. She kissed another girl like four days ago.”

Not that she’s been thinking about that.

“And she almost went on a date with her too, I think.”

LaFontaine runs a hand through their hair and scratches the back of their head. “Almost?”

“Yeah, she didn’t go ‘cause I invited her to the party, but she was going to.” She doesn’t see why she has to mention that Carmilla basically confirmed that she wouldn’t be seeing Elsie again, especially now that her temporary job at the music shop was over. Laura had tried really hard to not seem happy when Carmilla reminded her that Elsie was never going to work for more than a week.

LaFontaine just raises their eyebrows.

“You don’t think she didn’t go because of me do you?” Granted, that’s exactly what Laura had been hoping for, but she’s sure other factors had played into that.

“Uh, yeah, crushes-on-best-friends.”

And there it is, that’s a lot more along the lines of the accusation she was expecting. And maybe that’s another reason that she doesn’t feel like coming out. Just because she’s gay, doesn’t mean she’s in love with her best friend. Frankly, that’s a really gross stereotype. Gay women, lesbians, whatever label she settles on — they aren’t attracted to every girl on earth.

“No, I don’t—It’s just...” Laura shrugs, but she doesn’t have a clue how to explain this. She can’t find the right words. “Oh shut up, you’re one to talk.”

LaFontaine nods, and thank God for that.

(Laura really does have a point.)

—

LaFontaine changes back into their regular clothes after band practice — there’s something very wrong about trying to pick up in pajamas. Jeans feel a little more appropriate, and they laugh bitterly, because they realize the jean vest they’re wearing is the same one they were wearing when they overdosed last spring.

The money is still in their vest pocket, and it’s probably a little more than they need, but whatever, they’ll buy extra, if Kyle has it on him. The less times they have to make these visits behind the pool deck, the better. Perry is still waiting for them in the car, and the wrestling room isn’t far away, so the smell? Not great.
They’d picked up a few hours at their cousin’s lab over the weekend, mostly for an excuse to stay away from pretty much everyone. And now, no thanks to JP, to make a little extra cash so they could get what he couldn’t give them anymore. He was starting to get curious, and they didn’t need two people to worry about them, anyway. LaFontaine pulls out their phone to shoot him a text, they might as well end this right now before he blows it out of proportion.

**LaF (4:02pm):** so i actually just got an extension on that project that was stressing me out. i think im gonna just handle my shit without the pick me up from now on. everything’s fine.

**JP (4:04pm):** nice

It takes Kyle a few more minutes to show up, and his hair is a lot longer now than it was last spring.

"What's up, man?" LaFontaine meets him for an awkward fist bump — there's no real protocol on how to derail your life, so whatever.

"Not much, man, not much. Still disappointing my parents, you know how it is."

They laugh, even if it's a little bitter. "Yeah, tell me about it." They feel a little bit like an amateur when they have to look around before pulling out their money, but they really do need to make sure Perry hasn't gotten curious and come looking for them. "Listen, I uh, hate to cut this talk short but I don't have a lot of time."

"Yeah, don't worry about it."

Kyla barely has the brown paper bag out of his jacket pocket when they hear a voice and a chill runs through LaFontaine.

"What the hell are you doing?"

The voice doesn't belong to Perry and they honestly feel a little disoriented when they turn around to see Carmilla because — alright what the fuck?

Kyle laughs. "What does it look like we're doing?"

LaFontaine is frozen. Of all the explanations they had planned in case they got caught, this hadn't been a scenario they expected.

Carmilla checks behind her back and ducks under the awning they're standing under. "Are you buying drugs from this lackwit?"

"It's not what it looks like — I'm not like, an addict." And wow, that's a lot easier to say than it is to believe.

"I couldn't care less about your personal problems, why are you buying from from him?"

Kyle scoffs. "Look, bitch—"

"Get the hell out of here before I feed you your spleen." She says in that terrifying way that only a Karnstein can pull off. It reminds LaFontaine of the time they got yelled at by the principal for blowing up the microwave in the cafeteria.

LaFontaine clenches their fist when Kyle shrugs and walks away. "What the hell was that for?"

Carmilla rolls her eyes. "You don't want to buy from the Alchemy Club."
"Why the hell not?" They're getting angry, actually angry about this whole situation, and that can't be a good sign.

"Trust me, you're wasting your money. They're amateurs. And they'll get you caught." She sighs. "What were you buying?"

They swallow past the lump in their throat. "Oxy."

Carmilla nods, pulls a paper back from her back pocket, and rips a blank page from the back of her book. She plucks a pen from LaFontaine's vest pocket — uh, alright — and scribbles something onto the page before pressing it into their hand.

"You're welcome."

It's a name and a number.

"Who's Henry?"

"He's reliable, that's all that matters. And he's disconnected from this shithole of a school." Carmilla shrugs like nothing could matter to her less. "You won't get caught."

"How do you know all this stuff?"

"You're not the only one with something to hide." She puts her paperback back into her pocket. "He mostly does painkillers. I don't know about the rest of it, but I know he's reliable."

They nod. Disconnected from the school is good. That's one less connection to Perry. "Thanks. Uh, you can't tell Laura. Or anybody."

She scoffs. "What makes you think your problems are my problems? We're not bonding here, Bill Nye."

"Why are you doing this?"

Carmilla stares for a split second before she narrows her eyes. "Someone did it for me, once. And you're Laura's friend so. It would suck if you died from drug poisoning or whatever."

"I'll try not to."

Laura keeps telling them that they need to bond with Carmilla — maybe find something they have in common. This is pretty much the last thing they wanted to have in common with anybody, but they're also kind of grateful.

—

**Kirsch (7:31am):** what r u wearing?

**danny L (7:33am):** What, are we sexting or something?

**Kirsch (7:33am):** ew no

**Kirsch (7:33am):** its sports day. ur supposed to dress up in jerseys n shit

**danny L (7:34am):** I know, I can read.

**Kirsch (7:35am):** r u gonna wear a football jersey
Yeah, I have a cowboys jersey.

ew cowboys

why did u think we were sexting

—

Kirsch parks his truck in the third best parking spot — almost right behind his first period class. Nice. He almost never gets this spot because of the JROTC cadets that get to school at 7am.

He throws his bag over his shoulder and pulls the white jersey from the passenger seat — the only jersey he has two of, lucky for Laura.

The door to the JROTC classroom swings open from the back just as he shuts the door of his truck, and Kirsch spots Sam putting on a red beret on his way out.

“Bro, what kind of sports day outfit is that?”

Sam looks up and nods at him, waiting for Kirsch to catch up to him on the sidewalk. “Man, you know the drill, it’s Wednesday. Uniform day.”

“Aren’t you ROTC kids all about school spirit?”

“No as much as we are about the Air Force, apparently.”

Yeah, Kirsch can see that. Sam has at least fifteen ribbons on his uniform, and a bright yellow rope on his shoulder. And medals. A lot of medals.

“Your loss, man. Check it.” He points to his jersey and turns around so Sam can see the word ‘FOSTER’ over the 23 on his back. “We coulda matched, bro.”

“What’s with the second jersey?” Sam nods to the shirt in his hand.

“Friend of mine. She’s big on school spirit but she doesn’t own any jerseys, so.”

Sam nods. “Cool. Oh, uh... did Jake tell you about um...” He laughs and it’s a little nervous.

“No, Jake didn’t tell me anything.”

(Jake told him everything, but he decides to play dumb for the sake of Jake’s dignity.)

“Oh, he didn’t text you?”

(Only about 45 times in three minutes.)

“No, what’s up?”

Sam checks behind him to look towards the ROTC classroom. They’re a decent distance from the door but Sam still lowers his voice, which makes Kirsch kind of mad. This isn’t shit he should have to be whispering about, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell be damned.

“I uh, I asked him to homecoming.”

Kirsch grins, he’d heard every detail already from Jake, but he doesn’t really talk to Sam much and it’s actually really nice to see that he’s just as happy. “Dude, that’s awesome.”
His hand comes up to rub the back of his neck. “Yeah, you think so?”

“Totally.”

Sam smiles too, and nods. “Yeah.”

He looks happy — really, really happy — and Kirsch is almost jealous of him.

He really needs to get a date or something. There’s nobody he’s really interested in, though, and he’s really glad that for once, it’s not because of SJ. He’s never gonna not feel guilty about that night but — no, he can’t really think about that right now. He has to be happy for Sam. And he has to get a date.

One of Sam’s friends waves him down from the side of the language building and Sam tosses Kirsch a mock salute before he joins him.

Kirsch lingers by Building 9. His first period is right next door, and this is where she asked him to wait, so he leans against the brick wall and tries to fold the jersey so it’s not so wrinkled. He’s pretty sure it’s gonna be big on her — it’s even big on *him*, but whatever. It’ll look cute.

He pulls out his phone and messes around on facebook for a few minutes until she shows up, and he isn’t surprised that she has Carmilla in tow.

Laura has black paint under her eyes, and he laughs because Laura is somehow completely predictable yet unpredictable all at once. Kirsch holds up his second jersey. “One football jersey to go?”

Laura takes the jersey from him and her eyes widen — it’s practically a dress on her. “Wow.”

“Yeah, sorry, I haven’t been an extra small in a— well, never, actually.”

Laura smiles. “Thanks, anyway. Should be comfy.” She hands Carmilla her backpack without a word and Kirsch tries not to laugh at the fact that Laura, of all people, managed to essentially tame the meanest chick at Silas. Who is now holding her things for her and looking away the moment Laura starts to unbutton her top and— okay, *whoa*. Kirsch looks up, too, ‘cause she’s basically his little sister, but she’s also kind of a hottie. So that’s weird.

Carmilla is a little less respectful when she realizes that Laura has a tank top on underneath, and after that she kind of stares for a while, which he doesn’t blame her for.

The jersey reaches Laura’s knees and the three of them start to laugh when she holds her arms out — the sleeves are at her elbows.

Carmilla smiles like she’s trying not to, and hands Laura her backpack again. “I’m pretty sure we could both fit in that shirt if we wanted to.”

Laura looks at her chews on her lip. “Shut up, that means you’re small, too.” It works out that he gave her the white jersey — especially since the blue is his favorite — because they match her white converse. Kirsch would be lying if he said he hadn’t worn his red shoes to match, too.

“Seriously, though, thanks. My Dad left for work before I could ask to borrow his baseball shirt and it’s signed by some really important guy, I guess.”

He’s not usually a baseball guy, but signed jerseys? She’s got his attention. “Oh, sweet, who signed it?”
Laura shrugs. “Some guy with really bad handwriting?” She looks at the front of his shirt and then down at the 23 on her jersey. “Hey, why don’t we match if these are the same numbers?”

Kirsch has known Laura for five years now, and she’s never once retained an ounce of football knowledge, so he just shrugs. “It’s a football thing.”

“Got it.” Laura swings her foot in front of her to tap Carmilla’s shin. “You know, we could have matched today if you weren’t being so difficult.”

“Yeah, no thanks, cutie.”

Kirsch plays along, mostly because the idea of Carmilla Karnstein in a football jersey is officially his new favorite thing. “What, no sports day for you? It’s spirit week. Show some school pride.”

Carmilla crosses her arms and hardens in a way that she never does for Laura. “I’m sorry, do I strike you as the kind of person to have school spirit?”

“Whoa. Chill, bro.”

Laura’s reaches out and the moment the back of her hand touches Carmilla’s elbow, she softens again.

It’s almost hilarious how different she can be around Laura.

“Hey, be nice.”

Carmilla pushes her bangs back and her eyes widen, so she must know how whipped she looks.

“She’s just grumpy ‘cause she doesn’t get to join in on all the homecoming week fun without admitting that she actually does have fun sometimes.”

“Ah, gotcha.”

Carmilla scoffs and pulls out her phone. Laura’s eyes wander over at her screen before she sees Kirsch watching them and she looks up with her small talk smile on. “So, uh, do you have any homecoming plans?”

He thinks of Danny all of a sudden, for whatever reason, but yeah — no. That’s not a train of thought he’s gonna entertain. She’s hot, obviously, and like — he does dig her. On some level, she’s not as bad as she used to be, but she’s way too high maintenance. Not worth it.

“Oh, no plans, really. I think I’m just gonna go stag this year.”

Laura pouts. “What, no pretty girls you’re into?”

Again, he’s thinking of Danny. He really has to stop that.

“You’re like, the most popular guy at this school, I’m sure somebody’s dying to go with you.”

Not Danny, definitely not Danny.

He gets an idea and he goes for it, because it actually feels like a really solid option all of a sudden. And it’s not as scary as the alternative.

“Why don’t we go together?”
Laura looks at Carmilla just as her eyes shoot up from where she was looking at her phone. The girls share a glance and then Laura looks back to him. “That’s a great idea.”

“Yeah? Cool.” It doesn’t feel like a date, but it also doesn’t feel like not a date, so it just feels safe. Easy. “Awesome.”

“It’s a date.” She nods, and even though it’s just a saying, Carmilla looks like she could actually murder him. Which is a little funny and a little scary. “And hey, you better go all out. You should know, I have standards, and my Dad has a gun.”

Kirsch nods. “Oh, definitely. Prepare to be wooed, Hollis.” He smiles until he sees a head of red hair from behind Laura, and his heart does that really weird thing where he’s pretty sure it either missed a beat or it did one too many. He doesn’t know, but it’s weird and he doesn’t like that it keeps happening lately. He looks back at Laura and gives her a brief hug.

Her head has always fit nicely against his chest, and he leans down to rest his chin on her hair. He’s kind of looking at Danny when he says it, but only because she and her friends are in his line of sight. “You look cute today, by the way.”

She pulls back, and honestly he needs to check with Will that his sister isn’t going to murder him in his sleep because he’s not 100% sure about that now.

“Thanks, Kirsch.”

Laura (6:50am): okay. day four of spirit week. i still haven’t given up.

Carm (6:51am): not happening, sweetheart

Laura (6:54am): c’mon, it’s 50’s day! think of the potential, carm

Laura (6:54am): pls cooperate!!

Carm (7:00am): sorry, all out of poodle skirts over here. they must be at the dry cleaners.

Laura (7:01am): i’ll bring you something to wear?

Carm (7:01am): already dressed

Laura (7:01am): fine >:(

Laura (7:32am): can you bring your leather jacket to school?

Carm (7:36am): i’m not wearing a leather jacket in this weather

Laura (7:36am): didn’t say it was for you, grumpy mcNoFun

She must have done something absolutely horrendous. She doesn’t know what it was — maybe it was so horrible that she repressed it. Maybe she did it in a fucking past life. Whatever she did, it was truly awful, because by some consequence, 50’s Day is a legitimate thing. And Laura is climbing onto their school bus, dressed like an outtake from Grease. Her hair is back in a braid, and if that isn’t bad enough (which it really is), she has a white t-shirt tucked into a pair of dark blue jeans (why),
and she must have folded the cuffs of her jeans, because there’s a few inches of skin between the bottom of her jeans and her high-top converse (also why).

Laura relaxes the moment that she sees her, and Carmilla knows that has everything to do with the fact that she still worries that Carmilla won’t show up to school one day. She stopped sleeping over, she had to. Laura still doesn’t understand things well enough to help, and Will was getting curious.

And she missed him a little.

That had caused a fight between them, brief as it was. Laura got upset when she wanted to leave, and she doesn’t always say the right thing, but it had ended the minute that she gave in and accepted that Carmilla had to go home.

Laura had hugged her so hard that she could cry, and it had nothing to do with her bruises.

“Hey.” She greets Carmilla with a smile as she works her way towards the back of the bus, pouting when she can see Carmilla’s outfit.

(Jeans and a band t-shirt. *The 1975*, to be exact.)

Carmilla looks her up and down. “Mornin’, Greased Lightning.”

“Morning, grumpy gills.” She drops herself next to Carmilla and she smells really nice, so that’s also unfair. “Since when do you get on the bus before I do?”

Carmilla doesn’t know, “I don’t know.” She barely knows her own name.

“ Weird, they must have changed the bus route or something.” Laura takes her bag off and hugs it to her chest. “What’s up?”

Her heart rate, probably. There’s something just *soft* about Laura right now. Maybe it’s the fabric of her t-shirt, maybe it’s the way that her hair looks when it’s in a braid, or maybe it’s the way her lips always look painfully kissable — she can’t figure it out exactly. But she’s soft and warm and for some fucked up reason that’s about a thousand times worse than when Laura looks hot.

Which she also does right now, she looks really hot, because she never dresses like this. So that’s just another thing to feed this infatuation — interest, crush, love, whatever it is.

She’s glad that Laura is talkative today.

“Let me guess, you totally thought I was gonna wear a poodle skirt, didn’t you?”

“Guess I hadn’t really thought about it.”

“Well, if you were thinking that, then wrong. Also, sexist. I don’t see why a girl can’t be a greaser.”

Carmilla leans up against the bus window to face her. She really is beautiful. “It’s a nice idea, but maybe you should consult a textbook.”

Laura shrugs. “Historical accuracy is socially flawed. If this were really the 1950’s and I was really a greaser, I’d be telling you that your sexuality is a sickness of the mind.”

Carmilla hums. “Sometimes it feels like it is.”

She frowns and messes with the zipper of her backpack. “It’s not, though.”
“I know.”

The way that she looks at Carmilla brings back the hope that won’t leave her alone. She can’t be sure if she’s allowed to hope that Laura knew what she was talking about the other night. *I think I like girls.* That means one thing to Carmilla, but to Laura? She’s not a puzzle Carmilla is anywhere near close to solving.

She has no plans of asking her about it. Carmilla doesn’t want that conversation to start and end with *Of course, I like girls, I’m a feminist.* She prefers to pathetically cling to this single shred of hope, like any respectable person with an unreasonable crush.

If anything is a sickness of the mind, it’s the idea that Laura could feel this way about her, too.

She’s definitely a fool.

“Oh, did you bring the jacket?” Laura lights up again, kicking her legs a little in the way that she does when she’s excited.

Carmilla unzips her bag and pulls out the leather jacket. She doesn’t wear it often, but she’s a liar if she doesn’t admit she likes the idea of tying some of it’s memories to Laura.

“What?”

“It smells like you.”

She’s right, it does look better on Laura.

(Whatever it was that she did in that past life to deserve this, she doesn’t regret it one bit.)

—

Unlike the past couple of days, Laura actually keeps her spirit day costume on after school — she explains that the t-shirt is really comfortable — and Carmilla is grateful, because it’s still the cutest thing she’s ever seen her wear. Especially when she’s sprawled across the floor of her basement, her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth as she does her math homework. She’s never seen her look less like a gang member.

(For the record, the second cutest thing she’s ever worn would have to be the annoying puppy dog’s jersey. If it hadn’t reminded her so much of the date Laura had with him, it might have been the cutest.)

Laura tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and chews on her bottom lip. Carmilla lets the book she isn’t reading fall to her chest. She crosses her legs the other way and sinks deeper into the couch that she’s stretched across.

Carmilla checks the time on the cable box just to have something to do that isn’t *thinking.* She’s been doing too much of that lately, ever since Laura let slip that she *might* like girls, and then in her own
personal twisted version of *The Notebook*, conveniently forgotten it had ever happened.

And ever since the kiss with Elsie.

Ever since Laura started acting strange.

Ever since Laura’s birthday.

She had fucked up whatever they had, and she’d only made that connection on Monday at lunch, when Laura had leaned her head against Carmilla’s shoulder and then jumped back like she’d been burned.

She does everything not to think about the *what if’s*.

What if Laura does like girls. What if she had been too drunk to know what she was saying. What if Laura liked her. What if Laura had liked her, and she’d fucked it up by spilling all her tainted little secrets. What if. What if. What if.

Evidently, she’s skilled at avoiding these thoughts.

Laura shuts her Algebra textbook and bangs her forehead against the surface of the book a few times before pushing herself up from the floor. “That’s it, I’m done. I can’t do any more word problems tonight.” She shakes her head and looks at Carmilla with a sort of longing, like she’s searching for something that she doesn’t completely understand. Carmilla feels as if the bruises under her tight clothes are on fire. Like Laura can sense them, like she’s untouchable for reasons beyond her control.

She’s untouchable for a thousand reasons, and almost none of them have to do with Laura. Maybe she doesn’t deserve this, but her pride gets in the way, mixed with too many *what if’s*, and suddenly she doesn’t see why she can’t flirt a little. Maybe a lot. Why not? If she’s fucked this up, why not take her shot?

What’s the worst that could happen?

Carmilla sits up, swinging her legs to prop them up on the coffee table and giving Laura enough room to sit down. “C’mere.”

Laura furrows her eyebrows and smiles a little. “What are you—”

“Come here.” She waves her down until Laura sits next to her. “Lay down.” Carmilla puts a pillow on her lap and tugs on Laura’s shoulder until she relents and leans back against the cushion in her lap. “I’m bored.”

“So you decided I was the solution?”

“You have nice hair.” Carmilla pulls the braid apart slowly, running her fingers through temporarily curled locks.

“Thanks.” Laura looks at her hands instead of into Carmilla’s eyes.

Hope. Definitely a sickness of the mind.

“Hey, do you think LaF is acting sort of weird lately?”

Carmilla’s fingers pause near Laura’s neck. Her loyalties lie with Laura, but she wouldn’t appreciate anyone spouting her secrets at the drop of her hat. “Your friend, not mine, cutie.”
Laura frowns a little, and maybe this is why she’s such a good friend to everybody.

“Hey, why do you always call me cutie? Pretty much every other nickname you use is like... edible, but not that one.”

Carmilla twirls some of Laura’s hair in between her fingers and Laura closes her eyes. “That isn’t a hard one to figure out, is it?”

Laura opens her eyes. “What?”

“It’s not rocket science, you’re just cute.”

Laura laughs, but it’s hollow. “Oh.” She glances down at her clothes and her fingers brush across the fabric over her stomach. “Alright, very serious question.” Laura squints, trying to conceal a hint of a smile while Carmilla’s heart races.

“What do you have a thing for John Travolta?”

The tension of the moment shatters immediately, and they both laugh loudly.

“Asshole.” She says, pushing Laura up from her lap. It’s not very effective, because she only falls back into her lap a moment later, and now she has Carmilla’s fingers laced with hers.

So, maybe touching isn’t completely off the table, with whatever awkwardness lingers between them.

“Hey.” Laura lands a soft punch to Carmilla’s arm with her free hand. “How serious were you about not going to homecoming?”

“Very.”

It’s not like she could wear a dress, or be seen anywhere near Laura where her Mother is going to be chaperoning. She doesn’t see a point in going to homecoming if she can’t be with Laura.

“Why? It could be so much fun.”

She doesn’t bother explaining. Carmilla prefers the unspoken rule they’ve fallen into of not discussing that part of her life. “I’ve got more important things to worry about, cupcake.”

Maybe that’s the wrong thing to say. It’s definitely tip toeing the line between talking about it and not, but it’s better than the alternative.

Laura looks saddened. “It must be nice, sometimes, though. To ignore that stuff.” She shrugs. “For a while. Nothing to worry about except the homecoming dance, and whether the person you like is gonna be there.” She looks up at Carmilla and shakes her head. “That’s probably like, the most pathetic thing you’ve ever heard me say, huh?”

“Not pathetic.”

("What if, what if, what if?")

Carmilla traces the tips of Laura’s fingers with her own. Her thumb grazes the side of her hand. “I guess you won’t have to worry about that, though.”

“What do you mean?” She laughs, and it’s a nervous one.
“You’ll be going with the salivating manchild, right?”

“His name is Kirsch,” She growls playfully, like she hasn’t already had to correct her at least a dozen times. “And I don’t like him. I mean, I like him, but I don’t like like him.”

“Whatever you say.” It does make her foolishly happy to hear that, even if she can’t be sure Laura means it.

Laura pushes her hand forward to press their palms together. Their fingers close around each other’s fists, and Carmilla already starts planning. She’s been trying to solve this puzzle for days now. She has to figure something out.

Because there’s honestly not a chance in hell she’s missing the homecoming dance.

—

She totally has a plan — and it’s a little bit diabolical — but desperate times?

Carmilla has a weakness, and it’s snapchat.

Laura sends Carmilla a snapchat at 6:15am — a picture of her pop tarts. Carmilla responds half an hour later with a picture of a bowl of cereal in her lap.

Ripped black skinny jeans. Check.

She sends her another snapchat just before 7:00am, a really ridiculous selfie, and Carmilla sends one back a few minutes later. Or, she sends back her definition of a selfie, which is just a picture of herself raising an eyebrow at the camera. But, it does the trick.

She can see the shirt she’s wearing, the green short sleeve plaid. Carmilla always wears that with a black tank top. Check, check, check. And her hair is up in a bun. Check.

Check-ish. She doesn’t actually own any ripped skinny jeans because her Dad always insists on buying her new clothes when hers rip. Something about him having to wear ripped clothes as a kid because her grandparents were so poor, and not wanting her to dress like that. She appreciates the gesture, but right now she needs ripped jeans.

Ripping her own clothes for school spirit seems a little extreme, so she’s glad that she and Carmilla are just about the same size.

Laura steals a pair of jeans from Carmilla’s drawer. Sort of. It’s not exactly her drawer, but whenever her Dad does laundry and Carmilla leaves her clothes lying around — which she always does, honestly she’s a terrible roommate — he folds them and puts them in the top left drawer of her dresser. It’s mostly empty, except for a few pairs of Carmilla’s jeans and a couple of guitar picks that had ended up going through the wash. She should probably clean out that drawer and return her things now that Carmilla isn’t staying over every single night. But she won’t, just in case.

The pants are a little long — just barely, so she folds the cuffs up. She has a pair of black vans that she almost never wears, and they match perfectly with the green plaid she finds somewhere in the back of her closet. It’s not the right shade, but whatever. It’s the thought that counts, really.

She struggles with her hair for a good ten minutes before giving up and settling for the messy bun that she can manage. It’s lopsided, whatever.

Like she said, it’s the thought that counts.
Her Dad knocks on the door.

“Yeah, come in.”

The door squeaks open. “Wow, what universe did I walk into?”

Laura laughs and touches her hair in the mirror. The shirt doesn’t fall quite in the same way that it does on Carmilla — a difference in cup size, probably. Still, she looks kind of hot.

“Since when do you dress like Carmilla?”

“Since Carmilla refuses to dress up for spirit day. So, I’m not giving her a choice today.”

He shakes his head like he’s already given up trying to understand. “You ready to go?”

“Yep.”

Laura (7:40am): i’m getting a ride from my dad today, so i wont be on the bus. meet me outside the caf?

—

Laura (7:52am): we’re getting coffee, do you want some??

Laura (7:58am): you’re probably reading on the bus. we got you coffee anyway :)

—

So, this is two days in a row that the universe delivers a Laura-shaped fuck you to Carmilla Karnstein.

She doesn’t really wear her clothes for anybody else. Her appearance doesn’t matter much past pissing her mother off and covering cuts and bruises, so she doesn’t think about what she’s wearing until Laura is standing in front of her — well, wearing it.

“Are you wearing my clothes?”

“Just your jeans.” Laura hands her a cup of coffee — she doesn’t question it, Carmilla had seen the texts a minute ago. Laura tries to imitate her position, perching herself on the back of the bench outside the cafeteria. Their feet line up on the seat of the bench and Laura frowns. “You were supposed to wear your black converse or something, I don’t have boots.”

“I wasn’t aware there was a uniform today.” She wracks her brain for what day of the week it is, Laura had run through the spirit days at least four times, but she hadn’t paid any attention.

Laura sets down her cup and starts to rifle through her backpack before pressing a wrinkled flyer into Carmilla’s space.

“Day five. Twin day. Guess who accidentally has school spirit.”

Carmilla clenches her teeth together so that she won’t smile. Laura looks proud of herself, so she won’t suggest that she could easily change into one of the extra t-shirts she keeps in her locker.

She rolls her eyes instead and says, “Fine. You got me.” Carmilla takes a sip of her coffee.

“I’ve always got you.”
“So.” Laura is almost disorienting, dressed like Carmilla but acting like herself. “I was talking to Kirsch and Perry last night on the phone, and we have everything all ready for homecoming.”

Carmilla shrugs and sets the coffee cup between her feet on the bench. She starts to fold the spirit week flyer into a paper airplane. “I still don’t care.”

She cares.

“Yeah, well, I listen to all your angry existentialist punk rock fight club stuff, so I get to talk to my best friend about homecoming.”

“Fine,” She relents, sending the paper airplane flyer into the air. The wind takes it and by some miracle, it lands in a trash can. She’s not gonna lie, it’s almost an ego boost. “Enlighten me, then.”

“Kirsch said he was gonna wear a tie to match my dress, and he’s coming over at seven so we can have dinner with my Dad and take pictures and everything. Oh! And the dress is perfect. I’ll text you pictures of it.”

She doubts she won’t see it in person, not after the week they’ve had.

Laura continues to describe the details of her date in excruciating detail, and it sounds like the mix of a four year old trying to play the flute and nails on a chalkboard.

“I hope next year’s homecoming is better, though.”

“Why’s that?”

Laura shrugs and rubs a hand up her arm. “Well, like I told you, Kirsch isn’t the person I like.”

She hasn’t missed the shift in Laura’s pronouns, or the convenient avoidance of their usage. Carmilla doesn’t let herself dwell on it too much, because there’s something a lot less personal about Laura liking a guy over her than Laura liking a girl over her.

“I guess I’ve just always wanted the silly movie version of a homecoming dance. Or prom. You know, with someone that I like, Or that I’m dating.” Laura takes a sip from her cup and chews on the corner of her lip for a minute. “Someone who would order a limo, and take pictures with my Dad, and tell me I’m beautiful. And actually mean it, not in the friendly way.” She sighs and Carmilla does everything she can to not close her eyes and sink into Laura’s descriptions. “Someone who will slow dance with me and get me a really nice corsage. I mean, it’s practically a fairytale, I know, but I’d like something like that.”

Laura looks from her coffee to Carmilla and back down before she shakes her head. “But Kirsch will be great, too. He’s a good guy.”

Carmilla nods and starts to mentally add up all the things she’s going to have to get her hands on in the next 24 hours.

—

Homecoming isn’t all that bad.

The music is okay. Laura hasn’t been listening to the radio very much lately, so nothing feels like it’s been overplayed. The food is alright, but the punch seems a little suspicious, because there’s a
stereotype about teenagers and unsupervised bowls of punch, and that stereotype is usually right.

Kirsch hasn’t really paid much attention to her since they walked through the door, and she feels like a sad movie trope, because he’s off dancing with his friends and she’s sitting at a table in the corner of the gym. Except she isn’t pining after him, so at least she isn’t completely pitiful. She’s not even really thinking about him.

She’s thinking about girls.

Girls are like, really nice, and it’s taken her a while to really understand why she likes girls so much, but once she sees it, she can’t stop seeing it. There’s a girl dancing in a group of her friends by the DJ and her dark hair is a little messy, but she looks deliriously happy. She’s so pretty that it makes Laura smile. And it makes Laura think of Carmilla.

She kind of wishes that she had come, and Laura knows it was stupid to assume that she would. It’s not like she would just show up only because Laura had asked her to.

Although she did do just that last weekend.

Laura distracts herself from that train of thought because, whatever — last weekend was a mess. Somewhere in the middle of the crowd, LaFontaine and Perry are two of the only people who haven’t participated in some kind of grind line since they started dancing. She can’t see them, and maybe that’s for the best, since they’re not very good at keeping their best secret safe in public.

Laura feels like an ungrateful jerk about her situation. LaFontaine and Perry are proud to be who they are, even when they can’t come out to more than a handful of people. Meanwhile, Laura can’t even find it in her to tell her best friend how she’s feeling. It feels like a pretty big deal, and she’s in about as good of a situation as somebody can be, in terms of support and unconditional acceptance.

She’ll tell somebody soon. Even if it means getting teased for not knowing or not saying anything.

She’s really just bored, so Laura lets herself fantasize for a little while. She thinks about dancing with a girl. Maybe kissing a girl — she’s thought about that a lot lately. Dating a girl. That would be really nice. Girls are soft and pretty and she wouldn’t mind holding a girl’s hand.

She holds Carmilla’s hand sometimes, not for a long time, but every once in a while. And sometimes she’ll kiss her cheek and sometimes Carmilla will kiss her forehead and she guesses that’s probably what a relationship with a girl feels like.

The lines between friendship and relationship are starting to blur a little bit, and she really needs to watch her thoughts before she gives Carmilla the wrong idea. Or before she starts giving herself the wrong idea, because she can usually convince herself of almost anything and this whole thought process is going down a really dangerous path—

Her phone vibrates in her purse, and thank God. A distraction is exactly what she needs.

Laura reads the caller ID and smiles. She covers her left ear and holds her phone to her right.

“Hey.”

Her voice comes through low and rough on the other line. “Hey, princess. You bored yet?”

Laura rolls her eyes. Of course she’d call to make sure Laura hasn’t found something more interesting than her.
(She hasn’t.)

Still, if Carmilla is calling her on a Saturday night, that means she’s bored too.

“Honestly? Yeah. Kirsch is about the least attentive date on earth.”

“No,” She can hear the sarcasm dripping from Carmilla’s tone. “I don’t believe it for a second.”

“Yeah, well, believe it.” Laura shakes her head while Kirsch tries to work his way into a group of dancing cheerleaders. Predictable.

Carmilla mumbles something through the phone, but she can’t pick it up.

“Sorry, can you say that again?”

“Must have—” The line goes quiet, and all she picks up is, “Reception.”

Laura pulls LaFontaine’s jacket off of their chair to cover up her purse. “Hey, give me a second, I’m gonna go outside.” She stands from her seat and nearly collides with a student that she doesn’t recognize. He offers her an apology and she slips past him with a polite smile. When she reaches the double doors, she holds pushes them open with her shoulder and holds the phone back to her ear. “Don’t uh, don’t go anywhere.”

The doors slide shut behind her the moment that she lets go, and Laura breaks into a smile when she sees her.

“Wasn’t planning on it.” Carmilla hits the lock button on her phone, sliding it into her back pocket. The back pocket of her leather pants, and it’s in that precise moment that Laura finds the only confirmation she’ll ever need to know that she is definitely gay, because leather pants. Seriously, wow.

“You came.”

Carmilla shrugs a shoulder and sighs like it’s the least important thing she’s ever done in her life.

“What are you doing here?”

Carmilla looks down at what she’s wearing — leather pants, her boots, a white dress shirt, a blazer, and a tie. “Breaking the dress code, probably.”

Laura fully intends to respond to that comment the moment that her vocabulary starts to consist of words other than ‘Wow’.

The front courtyard of the school is lit by a few street lamps and a string of decorative lights wrapped around the trees. Carmilla takes a few steps forward until they’re both standing under the light. “You’re beautiful.”

Laura touches the fabric of her dress over her stomach to smooth out the wrinkles in place. “Thanks, this dress was really expensive—”

She shakes her head. “I wasn’t talking about the dress.” Carmilla tilts her head to the side, taking in Laura’s appearance. “But... it is a nice dress.”

Laura laughs. “Well, I’m not the one in a suit. Which... wow.”

Carmilla purses her lips and runs a hand over her black tie. “I don’t think it really counts as a suit
without the pants, but Will and I aren’t exactly the same size. The shirt is mine, but that’s about it.” She grins. “Don’t tell him I stole his most expensive tie.”

The way she’s looking at Laura sends goosebumps across her skin, or maybe she’s just cold. The moment she rubs her skin, Carmilla takes off her jacket and slides it over Laura’s shoulders.

“Thanks.” She slips her arms through the sleeves and touches the lapels. It’s warm and it smells a little like her perfume. Laura drops her phone into Carmilla’s pocket. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“Yeah?”

(Shes so glad. And sometimes it feels like Carmilla doesn’t even have to try to make her the happiest girl in the world. Laura really wants to know her secret.)

“Why did you come?”

She flicks the cuffs around her wrists open and starts to roll up her sleeves. “It was a test.”

“A test?”

“Mhmm.”

Laura likes the way she looks with her sleeves rolled up. It wipes the smile from her face, and she doesn’t bother to ignore the heavy feeling in the pit of her stomach.

And the lines keep blurring.

“A test of what?” She asks.

Carmilla holds her hand out between them. “A test to see if you saved me a dance.”

She reaches for Carmilla’s hand out of habit, muscle memory. Carmilla’s hand slides down her wrist to squeeze Laura’s fingers. She smiles.

“I didn’t know you even liked dancing.” She doesn’t know a lot of things right now.

Carmilla pulls her by the hand until they’re standing in the center of the courtyard. “If you tell anyone this, I’m going to deny it and probably never talk to you ever again.” She gives Laura a stern look that she doesn’t believe for a second. “But, I’ve taken dance lessons.”

Of course, she has. Of course, she’s good at everything, why wouldn’t she have? “Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously. You wouldn’t happen to know how to waltz, would you?”

Laura isn’t completely certain she knows how to breathe right now, waltzing is probably a stretch. “No. But I’m a fast learner.” She almost loses her train of thought when Carmilla pulls her hand back to graze each of Laura’s fingertips with her middle finger. She taps them idly and sets her hand back down.

“You could teach me.”

She knows the muffled bass sounds pouring out of the gymnasium are nothing even close to waltzing music, but Carmilla isn’t holding her hand anymore, and she kind of wants to fix that.

She kind of wants to pull her closer.
“The last time I taught a girl how to waltz, I got in a lot of trouble.”

“You got in trouble for dancing?”

“Apparently, it was all very scandalous.”

Laura laughs — always so overdramatic, as usual. It’s one of the things she likes about her. “How is waltzing scandalous?”

“Well.” She gives Laura what she wants, reaching out to take her hand again, and pulling her closer until she can squeeze Laura’s palm, their fingers intertwined. “I had this partner once. A dancing partner that I suppose my Mother didn’t really approve of.”

Laura’s stomach twists and she feels a white hot rage at whatever that means. Disapproval means punishment and she hopes that Carmilla can’t see the fire in her eyes. She’d hate for her to mistake what she’s feeling for pity.

“We were at some charity function that my Mother was in charge of, I suppose I should have put her name on the invite list before I asked her to come. My Mother doesn’t like surprises. Or waltzing, apparently.” Laura suspects she had a bigger issue with the gender of Carmilla’s partner than anything else, but she doesn’t say that. She thinks Carmilla probably knows that.

“We stood... face to face.” Carmilla looks away from their hands, and pulls Laura closer. She feels a hand on her hip, tugging her forward. “Chest to chest.” Laura hooks her hand over Carmilla’s shoulder and smiles between them. They sidestep, and Carmilla pushes her back a step. “All of that, um,” Their connected hands sweep over Laura’s head as she spins her. “Whirling.”

Laura giggles softly — she still doesn’t have a clue how to waltz, just like she doesn’t have a clue what they’re doing — but she likes it. She likes it a lot. Carmilla pulls her hand back and squeezes her fingers between hers. Laura looks down, because she’s afraid that if she looks up, she’ll think about kissing her again, and that’s a lot less complicated when she isn’t just inches from her lips.

And then she looks up.

“In my Mother’s eyes, it may as well have been sex.”

“Well, good thing your Mom isn’t here right now.”

Wow, she really did not think that one through before she said it.

“What do you mean?”

“That came out weird, I didn’t— I mean I’m not saying we’re—”

Carmilla shakes her head. “No, what do you mean my Mom isn’t here?”

“I—” Okay, that throws her off. “I just mean she’s not chaperoning.”

Carmilla drops Laura’s hand and frowns. “She isn’t?”

“I haven’t seen her, and I’ve been here all night.” She would have known had she seen her. She probably would have tried something really stupid if she had seen her. “What? What is it?”

“Nothing.” She blinks. “I thought she’d be here. I expect one of these days I’ll have to get used to the fact that my Mother lies more than she talks.”
Laura doesn’t really understand what that means, but it makes her sad.

Carmilla looks up to the double doors behind Laura and then offers her a mock salute. “Well. It’s been fun, sweetheart. But you should get back to the dance.” She smiles in that way that makes it impossible not to feel completely adored. Laura hopes her smile says the same. “Hate to see this dress go to waste.”

Carmilla leans back on her heel to walk away, but she barely makes it a single step before Laura reaches out to hold her in place by her tie. Will’s tie, whatever. By some instinct, she pulls her close in a single tug. It’s both too fast and too close, and Laura would be worried that she’d hurt her if Carmilla didn’t look so impressed.

“Can I help you?”

Laura lets out a breathy laugh and releases her grip on the tie. Carmilla doesn’t make any effort to move away, so she reaches out to smooth out the wrinkles she had made.

“You should stay.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows, and she really should have known she’d have to work for this.

“Come on, your Mom isn’t here, you’re already all dressed up.” She looks down between them because she really can’t resist. She’s hot and she’s really close and Laura decided about two minutes ago that she actually has a very serious thing for leather pants. She doesn’t know what to do with her hands so she just tightens her fingers around the fabric of Carmilla’s coat. “And I really want to dance with you tonight.”

She’s close to getting a yes, she can see it in the way Carmilla sighs.

“Also, I’m still wearing your jacket and I have no intention of giving it back anytime soon.” Laura smiles, holds her hand out for Carmilla — she hopes it isn’t sweaty — and adds, “I will make it worth your while.”

Carmilla pretends to consider it, even though Laura knows she’s already been convinced. They both know. She rolls her eyes and takes Laura’s hand. “Fine.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
“So, I thought you were too cool for homecoming?”

Carmilla turns to Danny and scowls, “Guess I had a change of heart.”

LaFontaine laughs and she turns in that direction, “What?”

“It’s just-” LaFontaine gives her a look, “Come on - we all know the reason you’re here.”

Carmilla looks to the crowd where Laura and Perry are doing the most bizarre version of the robot to a song that doesn’t even have a beat to justify doing the robot.

(Despite her best efforts she smiles wide.)

LaFontaine follows her line of vision, “Point proven.”

“Sh*t up, geek.”

Danny grins, “That’s the weakest insult that you’ve ever come up with.”

“Maybe I don’t want to waste my good ones on losers like you.”

Danny and LaFontaine share a smug look and Carmilla is wondering what made her think sitting with them while Laura danced was a good idea.

Danny turns her head and stares at the other side of the gym before looking back at them, “I’m gonna go head to the bathroom. Try not to brood too much while I’m gone.”

“And you said my insults were weak.”

Danny rolls her eyes and gets up to leave, leaving Carmilla alone with the Nosey One.

(She likes to nickname Laura’s friends.)

“So, it’s nice that you came for Laura.”

“Just because I’m holding your secrets doesn’t mean we’re friends.” LaFontaine’s face drops and she
feels a pang guilt. But LaF doesn’t need to know that so she rolls her eyes, “Please don’t look like I killed your puppy or something.” LaFontaine scoffs and Carmilla sighs, “So, uh, how are you doing?”

“So, we are friends now?”

“Listen, the last time we were alone, you were up to God knows what, so - I’m just checking to see that you’re okay.”

LaFontaine tenses, “I’m good, don’t worry.”

“Well, good. Because you mean a lot to Laura and I don’t want to watch her become a blubbery mess. Have you seen her when she cries? It’s a disaster.”

LaF grins at them, “And I’m sure you wouldn’t just love to hold her and kiss it better.”

Her cheeks flush, “Fuck off.”

LaFontaine laughs before smiling, “Honestly. I’m, uh, really glad Laura has you.”

Carmilla looks over, eyebrow raised, “That’s hard to believe.”

LaFontaine nods, “Seriously. I’ve known her for over a year and she’s never smiled as wide as when she’s around you.” LaFontaine groans, “Or when she talks about you, Jesus.”

Carmilla tries to hide her growing smile by looking down, “Whatever. This is too much bonding for me.”

“Are you ever going to drop-” LaFontaine stops mid-sentence and looks to the crowd. Perry is pointing and waving wildly and LaF suddenly gets up, “I’m sorry but I’ve gotta go.”

Carmilla watches as they run towards each other and meet in the middle of the dance floor, starting the most ridiculous dance she has ever witnessed.

She smiles as she watches Laura finds her way through the people to join her at the table.

“Hey!” Laura’s cheeks are flushed and her hair is slightly out of place.

(She the most beautiful Carmilla’s ever seen her.)

“Hey there, Dancing Queen.”

Laura giggles and reaches forward to pull Carmilla up. They’re face to face and Laura grins, fiddling with their fingers, “Come dance with me some more.”

“This song sucks.”

“The Cupid Shuffle isn’t that bad.” Laura laughs and stares out at the crowd, watching LaFontaine and Perry do some sort of synchronized dance move. “They’ve had that dance down since they were, like, 11.”

“I’m very sad to hear that.”

Laura rolls her eyes and smiles sadly, sighing out, “I’d love to have that someday.”

Carmilla’s heart aches, “Maybe you will, cupcake.”
Laura smiles at her shyly and starts telling a story about how Perry almost broke her shoe while they were dancing. Carmilla smiles and nods along when appropriate.

(It’s hard to concentrate when Laura looks so beautiful and she’s physically aching to lean forward and kiss her.)

The song switches to Ed Sheeran’s *Kiss Me* - she only knows because Laura has played it a lot this week - and she takes a deep breath before lifting up her hand, “Dance with me?”

Laura smiles, “Finally.”

Laura laces their fingers and leads them to the dancefloor and Carmilla turns to her, “The last song was lame.”

Laura tightly wraps her arms around Carmilla’s neck, looking her in the eye, “So are you saying Ed Sheeran isn’t lame?”

Carmilla narrows her eyes and playfully pinches Laura’s hips, “Shut up, cutie.”

Laura’s laugh is free and light and everything Carmilla wishes she could be. She wills her heart to slow down, but Laura is inches from her face and she doesn’t think it’ll ever stop beating this fast.

(As long as Laura is around, it probably won’t stop beating that fast until the end of her life.)

They sway slowly for a few beats until Laura’s voice is soft and shy in her ear, “You know, I’ve never slow danced with a girl before.”

At this point her heart is determined to break a world record for quickest pulse. “Hm. How am I doing?”

Laura shifts her face so that she’s facing Carmilla again, “You’re perfect.”

Carmilla’s mouth lifts into a genuine smile; it almost feels light and free.

(Maybe those things are meant for people like her, too.)

She has no words that wouldn’t confess all of the overwhelming feelings she’s been harbouring lately, so she settles with that smile and a little bow of her head. It brings their foreheads together and Laura doesn’t seem to mind because she blows out a small sigh as she keeps her head in place.

Carmilla closes her eyes and takes in a shaky breath. Hearing the words *kiss me* over and over must be some sort of cosmic ironic joke - but she can’t find it in her to care. Because right now she has Laura close and safe and in her arms.

(She’ll take on any cosmic jokes in exchange for this.)

Carmilla licks her lips, “I think I’d like that, too.”

Laura pulls back slightly - she’s still within kissing distance and *God*, Carmilla should get a medal in the mail any day now for her will power. “What?”

“Um,” she bites her lip and looks down, “What your friends have - Perry and LaFontaine. I think I’d like that, too.”

The slowest, most beautiful smile lights up Laura’s face, “Maybe you will.”
“Yeah?”

Laura nods and leans forward to kiss her cheek, “Yeah.”

Carmilla smiles wide once Laura has rested her head fully against her shoulder. Carmilla pulls her closer and places a soft kiss to the top of her head.

(The time for maybe’s is over. It’s time to start going after what she wants.)

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Kirsch leaves the gym and walks down the hall before ducking into an empty corridor. He checks to see if the coast is clear before reaching into his vest.

“Hey, what do you have there?”

Kirsch pauses, looking up at Danny with wide eyes. She’s standing at the corner and looking at him expectantly. He lets go and brings his hand out, “Nothing. What are you doing here?”

Danny squints, ”You looked suspicious when you left the gym and I wanted to see what you were up to,” she steps forward, “Don’t change the subject. You’re hiding something.”

"I could have been going to the washroom you stalker."

"Oh?” She raises an eyebrow, "And you were just going to whip it out and go right here in the corridor?"

He sighs, "Fine." He steps forward and scans the hall before reaching into his vest, pulling out a flask, “You can’t tell anyone.”

She rolls her eyes, “Of course I wouldn’t.”

“Thanks.” He blows out a breath, “That’s cool of you.”

“How else are you going to share?”

He pauses, “Danny, come on. I brought this for me and some guys. Don’t be lame.”

“You’re going to be wishing I was lame instead of telling the chaperones that you brought drinks to the dance.”

“Danny.”

She makes a face, “Kirsch.”

He scowls and shoves the flask into her hand, “Fine. But since there’s two of us we’ll have to go into a class or something. Come on.” He grabs her hand without thinking and they’re a few steps down the hall when they both look down and quickly pull away.

“I can get myself there without being led by a puppy.”

“Just shut up and keep a look out while I find a good room.”

(Next year he’s sticking to the punch bowl.)

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LaFontaine pours a cup of punch before feeling their blood turn to ice, “Sweetheart.”

They look up. “Hey mom.” They try to avoid her judgemental stare by glancing at the clock in the corner of the gym. It’s been a little over an hour and that means she’s only going to be chaperoning for one more. They’ve managed to avoid her this far and they don’t plan on changing that plan.

“I haven’t seen you all night, dear.”

They shrug and try to smile, “Not really that cool to hang out with your mom at homecoming, you know?”

She doesn’t smile back and it makes their stomach churn. “That’s an interesting outfit you’re wearing.”

They clutch the cup in their hand, “Mom, come on. Not tonight.”

Their mom frowns, “Susan, I was hoping you’d at least throw a dress on tonight. For homecoming. If I knew you would have dressed like this I would have made sure to be home while you got ready.”

Their chest tightens, “I haven’t worn dresses since I was like, ten.”

Their mom sighs, “I know, but it wouldn’t have hurt.” She glances around the gym before staring back at them with cold eyes, “You’re never going to keep that boyfriend of yours if you keep dressing like a dyke.”

The words reach forward and grab their throat in a chokehold. Their heart races and they search the crowd for Perry, “Mom. Please, can we not do this here?”

Their mom is about to continue but another teacher quickly comes by, asking her for assistance with some out-of-town students crashing the dance. She gives them a stern look and a we’ll talk about this later before walking away.

LaFontaine feels their throat close as they rush through the crowd. They feel the familiar panic growing in their chest and try not to focus on the walls closing in on them. They finally make it to the bathroom and dart to a stall, locking themselves inside. Their breathing is shallow and they clench their eyes closed, pressing their forehead against the cool stall door.

(They can’t find out. She can’t find out. She can’t find out.)

They try and do their breathing exercises but can’t help the paranoia of their mom finding out or Perry finding out or anyone finding out.

(They can’t keep track of all of their secrets anymore.)

They breathe in and count backwards, holding their breath despite the panic to try and shock their system out of the attack. As they try this they reach into their pockets and with shaky hands fumble to pop off the bottle lid. After shaking a tiny pill into their hand they throw it into their mouth.

It takes them a little bit to calm down, but eventually the breathing exercises kick in. Their phone vibrates and it makes them jump.

Carr Perr (8:02pm): Hey where are you? Everything okay?

They focus on the fact that it’s going to kick in soon and can already feel their breath evening out.
They walk out of the stall and go to the sink, throwing some cold water on their face. They’re finally able to take a full breath as they stare into the mirror. (They’ll do anything to keep from ruining this night for them and Perry.)

"It smells terrible in here."

Kirsch turns to her and dismissively waves his hand, "You get used to it."

"Maybe I don't want to get used to it."

"Dude, the wood shop is the best place. No one is ever gonna come in here," he takes a few steps backwards and trips over a few pieces of wood, stumbling into a table, "Shit."

She presses a hand to her temple, "You're such a fucking disaster. Just - stay away from all things that will make more noise."

He nods and walks towards the teacher's desk, dropping down onto the floor and leaning against the side.

Danny looks down at her dress. She didn’t pay over one hundred dollars on this to sit in a bunch of sawdust, "Um, my dress is going to get completely ruined down there."

Kirsch frowns before shifting to turn and open one of the drawers in the desk, "I think there should be some cloths in here."

He starts rummaging through the contents and Danny's eyes shift, "You shouldn't be going through his shit."

Kirsch gives her a look, "You're okay with drinking on school property but too good for a little theft?"

She opens her mouth but immediately closes it, "Good point."

He gives her a crooked grin and she huffs. He finally grabs a bunch of cloths, spreading them on the floor. He waves his hand, “Here you go, Your Majesty.”

She rolls her eyes but turns to hide her smile. It is kind of sweet.

Once she’s down she slips her heels off - only half an inch, sometimes she likes the person she’s dancing with to be a bit taller - and Kirsch raises his eyebrows at her.

“What? They’re not the most comfortable things in the world.”

He shrugs and goes back to looking through the drawer, “Oh, dude, I think I found some skittles in here.”

“Kirsch-”

“I'll go splitsies?”

Danny pauses, “Okay, deal.”
He laughs and she looks down to hide another smile.

(Homecoming has just put her in a really good mood.)

He scoops out the bag of skittles and drops a few on his way to pour some in her hand, “Oops, my bad.”

She laughs and grabs some, popping them in her mouth as Kirsch fumbles to hold the bag and open the flask. She rolls her eyes and sighs, grabbing the flask, “Here, let me.”

She twists off the cap and takes a large gulp, wincing, “I should’ve asked what this was first.”

“Don’t go weak on me now, Lawrence.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

He holds up the bag of skittles, “Cheers?”

She laughs and knocks the flask into it, “Cheers, asshole.”

(The wood shop isn’t the worst place in the world after all.)

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Perry searches the crowd for LaFontaine and frowns - they were supposed to be back a while ago. She feels her phone vibrate in her hand and looks down.

My Person <3 (9:34pm): meet me in the bathroom

Perry grins and darts across the gym. There’s nothing like a good old-fashioned make-out session.

(They made out for hours before the dance, but some more won’t kill them.)

She smiles as she sees Laura and Carmilla standing beside the bathroom. Well, Carmilla is standing on the wall beside the door; Laura is standing in between her legs. Carmilla nudges her and Laura turns around, an immediate smile lighting up her face, “Hey!”

“Hey, Laura.” She nods towards Carmilla, “Carmilla.”

“Annoying one.”

Laura scowls at her but smiles back at Perry. Perry tries to smile as politely as possible - this is cutting into kissing time - and walks forward, “Well, I’m just going to-”

“Yeah, yeah - of course!” Laura grins wide, “Have fun.”

She’s looking at Perry with an odd expression but she shakes it off and makes her way through the door.

LaFontaine is standing in the middle of the bathroom, pacing in front of the sinks.

They look up when they hear the door close and their frown is immediately replaced with a warm smile, “You came.”

She rolls her eyes, “Of course I came.” She steps forward and brings her arms around their neck, “I’m definitely in the mood for some more of your kisses.”
She closes her eyes but her kiss is met with two fingers. She looks down and furrows her brows at the sight of LaFontaine’s fingers against her mouth.

“Uh, as much as I love kissing you - which, A+ for me and my self-constraint right now - I didn’t ask you here to kiss you.” They put their hand down and scrunch their mouth to the side, “Well, I mean, hopefully some kisses - but they’re not the main point.”

They’re talking really fast and Perry smiles because they do that when they’re nervous. She scratches the back of their neck, “Baby, relax.”

They take a breath and smile, “Right. Totally. So, um,” they take a step back and scratch their face, “We don’t get to dance and be a couple in public, and I’m really sorry-”

Her face falls, “It’s not your-”

They hold their hand up, “I’m really sorry that the world sucks.” She smiles at them and their lips lift, “So, I was kind of bummed about it. But then I thought - fuck them.”

She laughs and they shake their head, “No, seriously! So, we can’t be out. That sucks. But they can enjoy their heteronormative privilege all they want because those assholes are missing out on the LaFontaine Homecoming Express Treatment.”

Perry cringes, “Oh my God.”

“So!” LaFontaine grins, “You’re going to get all the cliché homecoming experiences - in the span of five minutes.”

Perry giggles, a surge of giddiness rising up from her stomach. She reaches up to smooth out their collar, “You’ve seemed a bit off lately but this is the LaFontaine I fell in love with.”

Something shifts in their eyes, “I’m still me, no matter what.”

She grins and nods. “Of course. It’s just,” she sighs through a smile, “I missed you, weirdo.”

She continues to fiddle with their collar and they grin, “Control freak.”

Perry swats at them and they dart around her towards the bathroom door, “Okay, so we don’t have much time. You’ve gotta leave.”

“What?”

“Just leave and count to five before knocking and coming back inside.”

“LaFontaine-”

“Perr - we only have so much time alone in here.”

“Okay, okay,” she moves to turn but decides last minute to turn back and give them a quick kiss on the lips.

“Perr, there’s not supposed to be any kissing yet.”

“Just consider it a pre-LaFontaine Quick Homecoming Experience treat.”

“Jesus, it’s the LaFontaine Homecoming Express Treatment.”
She laughs on her way out. When she opens the door Laura is still standing in between Carmilla’s legs - except now she has her back to her and is leaning against Carmilla’s chest as she holds her phone up and shows her something on the screen. They look up at her when the door opens and smile wide as Perry counts to five in her head before stepping back inside the bathroom.

LaFontaine is nervously waiting on the other side and offers her a smile, “Hey.”

“Hi.”

They pull out their phone, “So, step one of LaFontaine Homecoming Express-”

“Sweetie, I don’t think you need to say it every time.”

They laugh nervously. It’s cute. “Right. Anyway, so step one is pre-dance photos. We kinda have to improvise, so,” they throw an arm around Perry and start taking a series of selfies, their face getting more ridiculous with every click.

She laughs, “We’re not going to have any stuffy cliché photos if you keep making faces.”

Their smile drops, “Shit - you’re right.” They straighten up and move their arm to hold Perry around the waist. She tries not to giggle as they attempt to keep serious faces, but after three shots they both burst into laughter. She turns to them and presses a long kiss to their cheek. She checks their phone and feels her chest warm; they look happy and in love.

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(When are they not?)

“Oh honey, I’m sorry, it’s just-” she looks down at it and another round of laughter starts, “Oh my God, is that a tampon?”

LaFontaine’s face is redder than a tomato and she feels slightly guilty for laughing but she can’t help it. They’ve managed to get a tampon and made some sort of origami flower out of toilet paper? Tissues? She’s not sure. All she knows is that whatever it is, it’s held in place at the top of the tampon with what looks like a hair tie.

“Listen, I didn’t really have much to work with and I know it’s not technically a corsage because you can’t wear it around your wrist - so just pretend it’s like a single rose or some shit.”

Her smile softens and she takes the - well, the thing from LaFontaine’s hand. She pretends to smell it and says through silent laughter, “It smells great.”

They roll their eyes so hard she thinks they’re going to fall out of their head, “Alright - whatever. Let’s just move on.”

They reach into their back pocket and pull out their phone, tapping it a few times before a song starts to play. “Step three: stereotypical homecoming slow dance.” They slip the phone into their pocket and offer their hand, “May I?”

She takes their hand and they pull her close, their fingers lacing and their arm thrown around her neck. She rests her hand on their hip and smiles, “Thinking Out Loud? Very good choice.”
Their cheeks pink, “Yeah, well. Ever since you got me to listen to it I really dig it for us.”

Perry hums in agreement as she leans down to press a chaste kiss against their lips.

They smile into the kiss, “You’re skipping steps.”

“Your rule-breaking is rubbing off on me.”

They laugh and pull back, shaking their head, “Patience is key, Perr.”

She tries to frown but it’s a complete failure when LaFontaine is looking at her with so much love that it makes her chest hurt.

After dancing together in silence LaFontaine suddenly twirls her a few times before she giggles. She’s pulled back and places her hand back on their hip, “So, do you have Laura on guard duty?”

They nod, “Mhm. Which really was my way of getting Carmilla to come along because she’s the one that actually looks threatening.” The song fades out, “Which brings us to step four, which is great because we’re running out of time.” LaFontaine leads her by the hand to the bathroom door, “And it’s the most important: the goodnight kiss.”

Perry smiles, “Finally - the kissing.”

They nod and give her a crooked grin, stepping close into her space, “Yes. The kissing.” They hover close, eyes darting close to her lips, “I had a wonderful night tonight, Perry.”

She bites her bottom lip, “So did I, LaFontaine.”

“Thanks for going to homecoming with me.”

They lean a bit closer.

“Thanks for taking me.”

Perry licks her lips as they continue to hover in front of her, “It was no problem.”

They lean forward and she closes her eyes, but all she gets is a quick kiss on the cheek and a soft goodnight, Perr close to her ear.

She opens her eyes and she knows her face must be screaming of disappointment. LaFontaine looks like they’re trying not to laugh and she huffs before reaching up to pull them by the collar of their jacket.

The kiss makes her feel dizzy and she doesn’t know when they’ll stop doing that.

(Probably never.)

LaFontaine is smiling against her lips and they exchange quick kisses in between giggles.

“So, tell me: how long did it take you to come up with this?”

Perry loves LaFontaine - she always will - but their romantic gestures aren’t really their strongest suit. She guesses it took about twenty minutes.

“Um,” they blush, “Fifteen minutes.”
She smiles and laughs as she presses another kiss to their lips, “You get an A for effort.”

“Yeah? Did I lose points for the tampon flower?”

“Please never say the word tampon flower ever again.”

They laugh and it sends a spark through her chest. They seem more relaxed and at ease by this point and it settles a calm over her. She can’t help but lean forward to press another kiss on their lips. And another one. And another. And maybe a few more.

(You were under the impression this meeting involved making out. So why not?)

LaFontaine has just gently pushed her against the back of the bathroom door when she feels a few knocks.

“Um, friends? I don’t mean to ruin the mood! But, it’s been a while. Carmilla can only growl so much before people start getting fed up with not being able to use the bathroom.”

Perry knocks the back of her head against the door and looks to the ceiling, letting out a laugh, “Um, we’ll be out in a minute, Laura! Thanks!”

She looks forward and smiles as she reaches up to rub some of her lipstick off of LaFontaine’s lips.

“There. Don’t want people thinking you’re making out with people at the school dance.”

They try not to smile, “Yeah. Wouldn’t want people thinking I’m with someone or anything.”

They look at each other for a moment before letting out a laugh and opening the door.

(She’ll always be with them. No matter what.)

-----

“Okay, but I can’t understand how you could possibly sit there and exist with that opinion.”

Kirsch takes a long swig from the flask, “Listen, you can sit there all you want but I’m still right.”

“You’re so far from right you’re left.”

“Did you get that from the internet? Who the fuck actually says that?”

Danny grabs the flask and takes another sip. He turns to her and watches as she wipes some whiskey from her lips. His heart picks up.

“You’re just - you don’t even understand how wrong you are and that’s what’s laughable here.”

“Dude, of all people in the world I’m ashamed that you don’t agree with me on this.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re like, an all-star runner. And you’re telling me you swear by Adidas? That’s nasty.”

“At least I’m not a Nike fuckboy,” she takes another sip, “You probably only like it because their tagline is just do it.”
Kirsch grins at her, “My brand isn’t the one that’s an acronym for *All Day I Dream About Sex*.”

He watches her cheeks flare, “That’s not what it actually stands for, asshole.”

“I’m pretty sure it is.”

“I’m pretty sure you’re wrong.”

“I’m never wrong.”

“You must really be drunk if you honestly believe that.”

He laughs and lolls his head to the side. Her make-up is nice tonight. “I’m not drunk, but like, almost buzzed.” He puts his hands up in front of him, “The tips of my fingers are tingling and numb which means I’m on my way to tipsy.”

Danny snorts and he smiles, turning his body to face her, “Seriously, here,” he hovers his hands in front of her, “Feel my hands. I probably won’t be able to feel it.”

She adjusts herself so that she’s sitting on her knees and facing him, putting the flask down beside them. She reaches up to grab onto his wiggling fingers and the moment she tries to grab them he pulls them back into fists. He laughs at the scowl on her face.

“What the fuck was that?”

He wiggles his fingers, “See if you can catch them.”

“Kirsch.”

“Don’t be such a pussy.”

“Don’t be such a sexist asshole.”

“I’m sorry,” he continues to move his fingers around, “Come on, just try.”

She purses her lips before staring at his hands with determination and trying to grab ahold of his fingers. He keeps pulling them back just in the seconds before she tries to swipe them and she lets out an exasperated sigh, “What is the point of this?”

“The point is to win.” He eases up a bit and in the next few tries she grabs them. “There! See? Now it’s your turn.”

She narrows her eyes but starts wiggling her fingers anyway. “This is the weirdest thing I’ve ever done.”

He waits a second and then launches his hands to try and grab her fingers by surprise, but she pulls back in time. She gives him a smug smile but he immediately tries again and catches her fingers; he grins, “You only think it’s weird because you suck at this game.”

She scowls, “Let’s see those fingers dipshit.”

He laughs and brings his hands up again in front of her face. “Try your hardest.”

She’s silent in concentration for a moment before speaking up, “Why do we always end up playing games?”
He looks up at her and she takes the opportunity to catch his fingers, her grip lingering a second longer than usual. He’s never noticed how pretty her eyes were and his stomach turns. “I don't know,” he shrugs, "They're fun, I guess."

“Except someone has to keep losing.”

He smiles, “Well maybe we’ll both just win in the end.”

She scrunches up her face and laughs, “You’re such a sap.” She shakes her head as she looks down and smiles, “I can’t believe I’m spending homecoming in here with you.”

He winces slightly, “Shit, I’m being, like, a totally bad date to Laura right now.”

“Don’t worry, I saw Carmilla walk in with her before I walked out of the gym.”

“Oh! That’s awesome. Now I don’t feel bad at all because they’re basically-” he stops mid-sentence and let’s it die in the back of his throat. He doesn’t know what they are, but he understands the danger of starting those kinds of rumours.

Danny looks at him with a quirked eyebrow, “Yeah.”

They share a look of understanding and burst out laughing.

“They’re quite the pair, though.”

“Carmilla seems more chill and Laura is always smiling so,” he shrugs, “Whatever, you know?”

Danny hums in agreement, “It’s weird.”

“Why?”

“No, it’s just-” she shakes her head and drops her hands, “I don’t know. Makes me think of dating and relationships, you know? And I just haven’t been in one in a while.”

“Ugh, yeah, no - I totally get that.”

Her eyes widen and she shakes her head, “Shit, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean-”

He shakes his head, “Don’t worry, just drop it.” He looks her in the eye and tries to manage the most reassuring smile he can, “Honestly, it’s okay.”

“Okay,” she nods and gives his hand a squeeze, “Cool.”

“I’ve, uh,” his neck heats up and he pulls his hands back to start wiggling his fingers again, “I’ve been wondering if I should start dating again.”

She swipes his hand and misses, “Really?”

“Yeah - I mean I’ve hooked up with chicks ‘cause, you know, look at me-” she snorts and he scowls, ignoring her, “But, yeah, I think dating might be cool. Like, at some point.”

“That’ll probably be good.” She sighs, “We’ll see.”

“It won’t be hard for you.” She stares at him and he shrugs, “When you’re not being a bitch you’re actually kind of cool.”
She tilts her head and raises her eyebrows, “I’m surprised you didn’t say ‘cause I’m such a hottie.”

“I’ve already stopped calling you that.” He rolls his eyes. Maybe he’ll have to start calling her by her real name or something to get her to notice. He pulls his fingers back before wiggling them again, “Plus, you have like, way more going for you than just being totally hot.”

Danny grabs onto his fingers but after a few seconds she still hasn’t let go. He looks up at her and she’s staring at him with the oddest expression.

(His stomach twists.)

“What?”

She takes a breath, “I’m going to preface this by saying I still think you’re an asshole about ninety percent of the time.”

(He heart skips.)

“What are you talking about?”

“Just – I just want to be clear. So that there’s no misinterpreting this.”

She’s still holding onto his hands and he almost winces because he thinks his palms are sweating. “Just spit it out already.”

“And,” Danny licks her lips. Kirsch’s stomach drops, “There’s no telling anyone about this.” He furrows his brow and she continues, “Seriously. If you do I’ll just blame it on us both being really drunk.”

“Danny, we’ve had like half a flask, we’re no where near dru-”

“Really drunk, Kirsch.”

She’s staring at him and he can hardly focus over the ear-splitting percussion line blasting through his head. He’s pretty sure his heart is going to explode at the rate it’s pounding against his chest.

She’s squeezing his hands now and his breath starts to pick up. He wants to reach up and loosen his bow tie because his collar suddenly feels too tight, but he’s too nervous to move. She leans forward and finally lets go of his fingers - only to bring her hand up to cup the back of his neck. His breath is shallow and he watches as her eyes dart from his eyes to his lips.

“Danny…”

(The name finally tastes sweet on the tip of his tongue.)

She presses forward and he closes his eyes as he feels her lips against his own.

(But her lips taste sweeter.)

It takes Kirsch a few seconds to realize he’s kissing Danny Lawrence – of all people – and that maybe he should do something like kiss her back before this opportunity slips away.

He moves his mouth against hers and throws one hand into her hair, scratching the back of her skull. He smiles as she hums into the back of his throat and he definitely wants to hear it again, so he works his hand through her hair - pulling her as close as possible. She nods into the kiss, bringing her other hand up from the death grip on his knee to cup his jaw.
Their movements are frantic before Danny pulls back so she can hike her dress up a bit and sit in his lap. He hardly has enough time to grin before her mouth is attached to his again, giving him a bruising kiss he knows he’ll be feeling hours later.

(His pulse quickens at the thought.)

He brings his hands down to rest on her thighs, giving them a squeeze as she bites his bottom lip before slipping her tongue into his mouth.

(Shes candy and whiskey. Shes the game-winning touchdown. Shes good.)

They’re going faster now and with all of this movement he can feel something sharp poking his side. He pulls back for a second and gets to finally take a good look at her: eyes wild, cheeks flushed, hair a mess.

(How is he just realizing how out of this world hot she is?)

“Uh, don’t wanna be a boner killer here-”

She looks mortified, “Oh my God.”

“But I totally have like a piece of wood poking my ass and if I don’t move I’m scared I’ll get splinters.”

She bursts out laughing into his shoulder, which gives him enough time to adjust his position. She leans back and laces her hands around the back of her neck, “Kirsch?”

“Yeah?”

“Just shut up.”

He grins as she leans forward to kiss him again.

(Yeah, he can do that.)

-----

Laura wonders what Beyoncé would do if she knew that her music was going to put Laura into an early grave.

She’s currently trying to remember how to breathe while Carmilla is pressed against her from behind and doing amazing things with her hips. The tug in the bottom of Laura’s stomach is almost painful as Carmilla uses the hand not pressed against her stomach to move some hair away from Laura’s neck.

She leans in close, hot breath against Laura’s ear, “I downloaded this album when you told me about it, you know - since you found it so inspiring.”

(Oh God.)

All Laura can manage to do is lick her lips and croak out: “Yeah?”

Carmilla nods against the side of her head, “Mhm. I picked up a few things.” Carmilla presses her lips against the shell of Laura’s ear, singing softly, “Take all of me. I just wanna be the girl you like, the kind of girl you like.”
Laura’s eyes flutter shut as she takes in a ragged breath, gripping as hard as she can onto Carmilla’s hand and pulling her even closer. Carmilla continues to sing in her ear and Laura is pretty sure she’s going to pass out soon. She can hardly keep her heart beat at a normal rate, with Carmilla’s hips sending her pulse into a sporadic frenzy.

(If waltzing may as well have been sex, she doesn’t know what this is.)

She thinks of her dream and Carmilla’s lips and that happy feeling it gave her. Everything is becoming messy again because Carmilla is suddenly hot and moving against her in a way that should be illegal in 31 states and-

The DJ suddenly cuts to a contrasting an old Taylor Swift song and Laura snaps her head to the stage, one of the chaperones yelling at the DJ.

(It wasn’t the most appropriate song.)

Her chest is heaving and she looks over her shoulder at Carmilla smiling at her.

“You okay there, cupcake?”

“Oh yeah,”—she can hardly breathe and her heart is about to launch itself out of her chest—”Just dandy.”

Carmilla looks like she’s trying not to laugh before twirling Laura to face her, pulling her close.

She puts Laura’s hands around her shoulders and Laura laughs, “This isn’t really a slow song.”

Carmilla gives her a crooked grin and looks down, shrugging as she puts her hands on Laura’s waist, “Maybe I’m in the mood to break the rules tonight.”

Laura’s breath gets caught in the back of her throat and - yeah, her heart is still racing, but maybe for a different reason now.

Laura tries to remind herself repeatedly that this is her best friend. Albeit her best friend that was just grinding against her and possibly making her a tiny bit turned on. But, still: best friend. And, besides, even though this is a different kind of dancing it’s still really nice.

(There feels like she’s going to get whiplash soon.)

Laura sees a flash of grey, “Kirsch?”

He was rushing past and stops at the sound of his name. Laura notices his bow tie is crooked and the second top button of his dress shirt is undone. She furrows her brow, “Are you alright?”

“What?” His eyes shift around and he laughs, “Of course.”

Carmilla looks him up and down, “You look suspicious.”

“Dude, you’re seeing things.” His eyes scan the gym again and he motions to a group of Zetas, “Laura, sorry I’ve been MIA, but, I’ve just gotta go ask a buddy—”

“It’s okay. I’m excellent company, puppy boy.”

(Laura’s chest warms.)

“Nice, nice! Alright, so, I’m just gonna,” he hooks his thumb over his shoulder and bolts.
They exchange a glance before bursting out laughing.

“What was that?”

Carmilla shrugs, “Don’t know. Don’t care.”

Laura smiles and reaches down to grab her hand, “Let’s go get some punch. I’m kind of thirsty.”

Carmilla grins and leans in close to her ear as they walk away, “You got a little worked up in there, huh?”

Laura swats at her arm as she leads the way to the punch bowl.

(Sh’e’s not going to dignify that with an answer.)

-----

Danny smooths her dress and makes her way into the gym with her head held high. She has nothing to feel ashamed of; what happened between her and Kirsch was completely normal.

Completely normal make out session with one of the most annoying people she knows.

Nothing to freak out about.

(So she may have spent the past fifteen minutes pacing in the girls’ bathroom and having a mini meltdown - but no one needs to know that.)

She starts to get that strange feeling like all eyes are on her. Which she would dismiss as paranoia but - no, everyone in the gym is actually starting to stare at her.

Maya rushes up to her, “Dan, where the hell have you been?”

Her throat closes, “Um, phone call from my mom.”

“Jesus - Dan, they announced you for Homecoming Queen.”

Her eyebrows shoot up, “I wasn’t even nominated.”

“Yeah, well,” Maya grins, “The Summer Soc girls convinced a bunch of people to do a write-in vote.” She looks over Danny’s shoulder, “Okay, but go grab your crown because it’s been awkward waiting for you.”

“Fuck,” Danny rushes forward and Maya says something along the lines of not the only write-in, but she has no time to stop and listen. She excuses herself through the crowd until she gets to the stage and stops in her tracks.

Sitting on the edge of the stage - swinging his oversized feet and wearing a ridiculous crown - is Kirsch. He gulps and offers her a weak smile as one of the teachers crowns her and directs her to the centre of the gym for the homecoming King and Queen dance.

She hardly looks at him until they’re awkwardly standing in the middle of the dancefloor, the beginning notes of Passenger Seat beginning to play.

Their eyes finally meet and her heart picks up a bit.

(Completely normal.)
He rolls his eyes and takes a quick step forward to grab one of her hands, resting his other hand on her hip. She brings her hand up to cup the back of his neck.

(The last time she did that, she was - no, she doesn’t need to think of that right now.)

He clears his throat, “Uh, so this is a nice song.”

“Yeah, Death Cab’s one of my favourite bands.”

“Right, yeah. They’re cool.”

The silence is painful but she makes sure to train her eyes over his shoulder until he lets out a sigh. “So, this is weird.”

“It’s not weird. If anyone is being weird it’s you - not me.”

Kirsch turns his head and she looks to him out of instinct. He is way too close.

His eyebrows shoot up, “I was talking about us being crowned tonight. You know, since we weren’t actually on the ballot.”

Her cheeks warm, “Oh. Yeah, of course.”

Another awkward silence blankets them and her palms are sweating trying to think of something to make it go away.

“I don’t know why they would have voted you in.”

(An insult - that’s perfect.)

“Everyone probably voted for me because I won us the homecoming game last night.”

She scoffs, “Just because you threw three touchdowns doesn’t mean I forgot about the two interceptions.” He would have usually given a witty remark at this point so she turns to him; he’s grinning. “What?”

“You knew my stats.”

“So?”

“So, it means you went to the game.”

Damn. “Well, whatever. It’s a big game.”

“Uh huh,” he steps back to spin her before pulling her close again, “Maybe you are stalking me.”

She laughs at that, “I wouldn’t dream of it.” She pauses. “That last touchdown was pretty impressive.”

She sees his face light up out of the corner of her eye, “Well, I am a wicked quarterback.”

“I guess on occasion that’s true.”

He smiles at that and they fall into another silence but this time she can breathe a bit easier. This is normal. This is how they always are. Except:

“You know, you’re a pretty good kisser.”
(So much for normal.)

She reflexively squeezes his hand and continues to avoid his eyes, “Of course I am.”

He brings their joined hands to his shoulder so he can hold both hands on her waist and lean back to look at her, “C’mon. That’s all you have to say?”

“Well, no.”

His smile grows, “Go on.”

“I’m actually an excellent kisser.”

He rolls his eyes, “Admit that I’m a good kisser.”

“I’m not a liar.”

“Listen, you can’t make the kinds of noises you did and not admit-”

She shushes him immediately and darts her eyes around the gym as if everyone could hear him, “Shut up. Alright, so you’re an okay kisser.”

“Danny-”

“Fine - a good kisser. You’re a good kisser, okay?”

“Yeah, well, I already knew that but you didn’t need to bring it up so many times. It’s like you’re obsessed with me.”

The laugh leaves her throat before she can stop it and he won’t stop smiling. She steps on his toe for good measure and he lets out a mix between a laugh and wince. The look on his face reminds her of the night in his truck last week and her chest shakes harder.

When he’s composed himself he shakes his head and gives her another shit-eating grin, “Danny Lawrence, are you actually having a good time?”

She presses her lips into a tight smile, “You’ll never be able to prove it.”

“Yeah,” he laughs, “You’re probably right.”

She lets out a soft laugh and shifts forward, resting her cheek against his. He tugs her a bit closer and she lets herself close her eyes and enjoy the end of the song.

(She’s not sure what normal is anymore, but maybe she doesn’t need to figure it all out right now.)

-----

The car slows to a stop in front of Laura’s house. LaFontaine turns around, “Goodnight, Laura.”

Laura takes off her seatbelt and opens the door, “Night, LaF! I’ll see you Monday.”

She’s out the door and LaFontaine turns to Carmilla, “Are you staying, too?”

“Um, no. Just - give me a minute, okay?”

LaFontaine turns to her and smirks, “Yeah, yeah - go work your magic.”
Carmilla throws a *shut up, dipshit* at LaFontaine as she scrambles out of the car, trying to catch Laura before she gets inside.

(Here goes nothing.)

-----

Laura hovers by her door and smiles when she sees Carmilla walking up to the porch. “You didn’t have to walk me to the door.”

Carmilla stands in front of her and smiles, shrugging, “What kind of person would I be if I didn’t?”

Laura rolls her eyes and reaches forward to play with the lapels of Carmilla’s jacket, “I guess not you.”

“What do you mean?”

Laura looks up at her, “You’re always so sweet to me. You’re so,” Laura shakes her head and lets out a soft laugh, “You’re perfect.”

Carmilla grins, “You may have mentioned that once or twice tonight.”

Laura bites her lip and tugs at Carmilla’s jacket playfully, pulling her closer. Laura isn’t sure why she’s glad that Carmilla doesn’t move back. “Shut up.”

Carmilla smiles down at her and the soft porch light frames her face beautifully. She’s not sure why it’s so glaring all of a sudden, but Carmilla is *really* pretty tonight. Like, absolutely beautiful. Not that she wasn’t before, but - something is different.

She starts to feel dizzy and needs to snap out of it, “So, did you have a good time?”

Carmilla shrugs, “It wasn’t completely terrible.”

“Huh,” Laura raises an eyebrow, “I beg to differ.”

“Oh? Do you?”

“Mhm,” she steps forward and moves her hands to play with Carmilla’s tie, “I think you had a great time.”

“Yeah, well. Maybe. I don’t know. The company wasn’t completely terrible.” Carmilla looks like she’s trying not to grin and it settles a warmth in Laura’s chest. Her heart starts to beat fast.

Carmilla’s eyes shift and she looks down, “I’m sorry you didn’t get all the typical movie homecoming stuff you wanted.”

(She thinks of waltzing and laughing and holding hands.)

“I got something better.”

Carmilla looks up at her and Laura tries to remember how to take in a breath. Her neck feels warm and her palms are probably sweating so she tries not to fiddle too much with Carmilla’s tie. Carmilla looks a little strange and Laura considers taking it back until she watches her mouth grow and smile wide.

(She’d never take back something that caused that.)
“That’s good, then. And,” Carmilla licks her lips, and stuffs her hands into her jacket pockets, “I’m not sure if Kirsch took pictures with you and your dad or if he got a limo or anything - and obviously I couldn’t do those things - but um,” her hands shift nervously in her pocket and Laura smiles, reaching forward to put a stilling hand on her forearm.

“Carm, relax.”

Carmilla nods and laughs nervously, “Yeah, sorry. But, um, you did get your slow dances and - this is kind of stupid, but,” she takes a deep breath before pulling something out of her pocket and shoving it in front of Laura.

When she looks down she feels her chest tighten at the sight of a beautiful corsage. It’s completely crumpled - probably because Carmilla has somehow managed to keep it in her pocket all night - but still, it’s a beautiful corsage all the same.

“Carm…”

Carmilla runs a hand through her hair, “I know it’s not the exact shade of pink of your dress but it was kind of hard to see from your picture. But I did get a black ribbon to match the bow of your dress - which, I know that’s kind of lame but I figured you might appreciate it.” She pauses, “Maybe.”

Laura stares at the corsage, feeling hot all over. Her pulse is ringing in her ears and she manages: “Put it on me?”

Carmilla looks at her with nervous eyes and nods, “Yeah, of course.”

Carmilla slips it on her wrist and takes her time tying it on. Laura feels her chest swell at the sight of it, breathing out, “Carmilla, it’s amazing.”

Carmilla looks up at her with a small smile, “Really?”

“Yeah,” she stares at the light reflecting off of Carmilla’s face, “Beautiful.”

She can’t stop herself from launching forward and wrapping her arms tightly around Carmilla’s neck, “Thank you so much for this night.”

Carmilla nestles her face into Laura’s neck, breathing out, “Of course, any time.”

Laura pulls back and holds onto Carmilla’s shoulder, inches from her face. She licks her lips for what feels like the hundredth time in five minutes but her mouth is just so dry.

They both startle at the sound of LaFontaine’s car horn. Carmilla rolls her eyes and honest to God snarls at the sound. “I hate your friends.”

Laura smiles, “No you don’t.”

Carmilla sighs and before she can say another insult Laura leans up and presses a lingering kiss to Carmilla’s cheek. When she moves back Carmilla’s cheeks are pink.

(Her heart picks up some more.)

“Thanks again.”

“No problem, cutie.”
Carmilla gives her a kiss on the cheek this time before stepping back to walk to the car. Laura already has her hand on the doorknob when she hears, “Laura?”

She turns back, “Yeah?”

Carmilla takes a deep breath, “Were they at the dance?”

“Who?”

“The person you liked.”

Laura shrugs and smiles, “Maybe she was.”

Carmilla’s face lights up before she nods and turns towards LaFontaine’s car; they honked again and she watches Carmilla give LaFontaine the finger on the way back. Laura shakes her head and walks into the house. She closes the door and leans against it, smiling wide enough that she bursts into a small giggle. She runs her hand over the corsage and sighs.

She should have known that she never needed to worry if the person she liked was going to show up because of course Carmilla would go to the dance for her.

Laura stills.

Wait.

She doesn’t - oh.

Laura grins as wide as possible and lets out another small laugh. It’s like she can see the world in technicolour now - everything is so clear and wonderful and exciting.

She feels like she floats to her room, in a happy daze as she takes off her dress and make-up and gets into pyjamas.

She curls into bed and puts on her Love Songs <3 playlist, smiling wide at the ceiling.

She likes Carmilla.

(There’s no more maybe about it.)

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Carmilla lays in bed, smiling at her ceiling as another uncharacteristic pop song comes on her L. playlist. The chorus is about to start for another ridiculous One Direction song when it abruptly cuts out with the sound of her ringtone. She looks over and sees Laura’s face, smiling as she answers, “Couldn’t get enough of me, huh?”

“I’m gay.”

Carmilla sits up abruptly, her heart jumping in her chest, “Welcome to the club, sweetheart.” There’s a pause. Carmilla can’t breathe, “Laura?”

“I just - I was replaying our night over in my head,” Carmilla smiles and bites her lip, “And I realized I said some things that were - well, I said she instead of he and - oh God - you probably didn’t even notice, did you? You probably just said goodnight and went home like a normal person and here I am lying in bed having a gay panic because I accidentally came out when I didn’t come out at all and now I ironically actually did come out and-”
“Laura.”
There’s a deep breath on the other line, “Yes?”

“Breathe.”

“Right.”
A pause. “Laura, actually breathe.”

“Right,” a deep sigh, “Thanks.”

“Any time, cupcake.”

“So... are we okay?”

Her chances just increased, but Laura probably still wants nothing to do with her, so okay is stretching it. “Yeah, of course we are."

“Okay. Um, good. Great. Its just...”

“What?”

“You don’t think it’ll be weird?”

“Why would it be weird?”

(She can think of a few reasons, but they’re probably not the same reasons Laura is thinking.)

“Just because - I don’t know. I mean, we’re both gay - and, you and I, well…”

She grips her phone. Her heart rate picks up, “You and I what?”

Laura takes in a deep breath and there’s a sudden knock on her door. “Fucking - hold on, Laura,” she covers her phone, “Who is it?”

“It’s me.”
She rolls her eyes and sighs, “I’m busy, William. Come back later. Or tomorrow. Or never.”

“Are you decent?”

“No, I’m fucking naked, so go back to bed.”
Will opens the door and scowls at her, “I need to talk to you.”

“I’m a little busy right now.”

“Carmilla, please.”
She takes a proper look at him, noticing his frantic eyes and slight twitch of his leg. She feels a cool dread course through her and she takes her hand off the phone, “Laura, I’m really sorry but I’ve gotta get off the phone. We can talk later, okay? I promise.”

“Uh, yeah. Of course.”
She tucks her head to the side and lowers her voice, “Will looks kind of upset so I just wanna make
“Sure he’s okay.”

“Oh! Okay, okay. You’re so sweet.”

She rolls her eyes, “Don’t remind me. Goodnight, cutie.”

“Goodnight Carmilla.”

She throws her phone on the bed and immediately gets to her feet, crossing the room to him. She darts her eyes across his body, looking for any marks or things out of place.

(He’s never been in danger before, but it doesn’t stop her from constantly worrying.)

“What’s wrong?”

“Um,” he fidgets with his hand and his leg is still twitching.

She puts a hand on his shoulder and looks him in the eye, saying as soft as possible, “Whatever happened, you can tell me. And I promise it’ll be okay.” He takes in a shaky breath and she squeezes lightly, “Seriously, no matter what-”

“I’m gay.”

(Does she have a tattoo across her forehead that says homosexual guru or something?)

“Holy fuck,” she blows out a breath as she feels the tension in her body automatically lift, “Jesus Christ, Will.”

He tenses and straightens up, narrowing his eyes, “What? Do you have a problem with this or something?”

He’s trying to look tough, but she can hear the insecurity in his voice. Her face softens, “No, of course not. I just - sorry, you had me worried something else was up.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“Nothing,” she waves her hand, “Nevermind.” She sits down on the bed, patting the spot beside her. He drags his feet as he sits down, avoiding her eyes.

“So, you’re gay.”

“Yup.”

“Just like out of the blue, or-”

“Carmilla-”

“It’s a joke. Relax, okay?” He blows out a breath and nods. “But, yeah, that’s cool. Obviously no problems on my end.”

He’s hunched in on himself. She frowns; she’s never seen him this small. “Do you think anyone else will have a problem with it? I mean, Sam and Jake came out tonight since they went to the dance together, and I just thought - I don’t know, they’re pretty cool and people still like them so,” he trails off and just shrugs.

“I think they’ll be fine. If not I’ll just kick their ass - problem solved.”
“Carmilla. You’ve gotta stop doing that.”

She feels a lump in her throat, “Yeah.”

He picks at his track pants, “Do you think mom will care? I mean, she’s okay with you being gay so it’ll be cool for me, too, right?”

She thinks of the day she came out to her and her chest tightens. “Yeah, she’ll be fine with you.”

He nods, “Cool.”

There’s a short silence and she shoves him with her elbow, “Okay, this much bonding is grossing me out. Go throw Netflix on.”

He scoffs, “What the hell makes you think I want to waste more time with you?”

“Please. You’re a baby gay and just came out. There’s probably a million homoerotic films you’ve been too scared to watch on here in case I saw your queue.”

“Fuck off,” He grins as he turns on the TV, “We could always watch Glee again since you’re so gay for it.”

“Would you shut the fuck up about that already?”

He laughs as he starts scrolling through the options.

(They’re going to be okay. At least he is, anyway.)

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Laura scrolls through photos of her and Carmilla on her phone. Taylor Swift is in the background singing something about best friends and falling in love - she really loves this new album - and her cheeks are starting to hurt from grinning so much. The screen suddenly changes to a grumpy picture of Carmilla and her face lights up, “Hey you.”

“Hey. So, you wouldn’t happen to be home, would you?”

“It’s 10:30 on a Thursday night - I’m obviously out with my girl gang.”

“Well, you are into ladies now. I’m not surprised.”

Laura blushes, “Carm—”

“But, seriously - are you? Because if not I guess I can just hang out and watch sitcoms with Marcus.”

Laura is already out of her bed and walking towards the door, “You’re actually here?”

“Guess you’ll just have to come to your front door and find out for sure.”

She takes the stairs two at a time and then decides to pace herself. If she falls and snaps her neck she’ll lose another opportunity for kissing - which she has been trying to get a lot of this week.

(Laura has counted at least 17 times she could have kissed Carmilla but chickened out.)

She pauses at the door and smooths her hair before opening it. Carmilla is leaning against the frame
with a crooked smile, holding up a video game, “In the mood to be extremely violent?”

“Always,” Laura cringes as her face heats. She needs to remind herself to spend less time staring at Carmilla and more time paying attention to the words coming out of her mouth. She shakes her head and reaches forward to pull Carmilla in by the hand, closing the door quietly behind her.

“So, hi.”

Carmilla squeezes her hand and smiles, “Hi.”

“You look really cute tonight.”

Words. She needs to control her words.

Carmilla bites her lip and grins, shaking her head, “You always look cute, so.”

(Laura frowns. Damn. She should have said that.)

“So, video games, huh?”

Carmilla nods, “Yup. I was in the mood for mindless killing.”

“And here I thought you hung out with me because you liked me.”

“Oh, you have no idea.”

Laura’s heart races, “Is that so?”

Laura blushes and looks down, toying with Carmilla’s fingers, “Well it’s a good thing you’re also one of my favourite things in the world.” She looks up and with Carmilla smiling like that she doesn’t know how to not kiss her - but the entrance to her house is hardly romantic - so she settles for a hug instead.

Carmilla stills against her and she can feel her take in a sharp intake of breath when Laura squeezes a little hard. She pulls back and frowns, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah - uh,” Carmilla’s eyes dart, “Your hands just caught the back of my hair and pulled it accidentally.”

“Oh God, I’m sorry.” She gives her a kiss on the cheek out of instinct, “Better?”

“Maybe you should try once more just in case.”

Laura giggles and then winces, “We should be quiet, I don’t want my dad to-”

“Wonder what you’re doing here so late?”

Laura slowly turns and gives her dad her most convincing smile, “Hi, dad.”

Carmilla steps forward slowly and nods, “Marcus.”

Laura watches as her dad tries not to smile. He sighs, “So, is there a reason?”

“Um, homework? I have huge math test tomorrow.”
“You just had one yesterday.”

Crap. “Right. Well, you know Miss Verdona - always the tyrant.”

He rolls his eyes and pinches his nose, “Please, just - don’t be loud and please don’t go to bed too late.”

Laura grins and grabs Carmilla’s hand before tugging her quickly towards the basement. She’s not as fast as usual, but Carmilla is just probably trying to behave while her dad is still watching them.

They get downstairs and Laura grabs the game from Carmilla as she slowly sets herself down in front of the couch, “So, Call of Duty - we’ve played this before, right?”

Carmilla smiles, “That was Halo.”

“Oh,” she shrugs, picking up two of Carmilla’s controllers - she decided to keep her extra Xbox here last week so she doesn’t need to keep lugging it back and forth - and snuggles up beside Carmilla on the floor. She passes her a controller, “Are they the same?”

“Not really.”

Laura rests her head on Carmilla’s shoulder as Carmila navigates the menu screen, “Oh well. I’m sure I’ll pick it up easily enough.”

Laura isn’t really sure at all, but that doesn’t really matter right now. What matters is that she’s pressed as close as she can to Carmilla. Which is kind of nice.

What would be nicer?

Kissing Carmilla. In real life.

She’s thought about it all week and even though she’s had opportunities they just never felt right. Plus, there’s the fact that every time she goes to try she think she’s going to give herself an early heart attack, so that’s been quite the deterrent, too.

Plus, Carmilla probably doesn’t even like her that way and how completely embarrassing would it be to try and kiss your best friend only to get rejected?

(The answer: too embarrassing for Laura to try.)

“Laura?”

“Huh?”

“Are you going to press start or just stare at me all night?”

Laura blushes and scrambles to press a few buttons on her controller, “Oops, sorry.”

Carmilla laughs but gently shrugs her off of her shoulder, rubbing at it, “You’ll never be able to play like that.”

“But you’re so comfortable.”

Carmilla shakes her head and starts hitting a bunch of buttons, the sound of explosions and yelling soon filling the basement. Laura makes a valiant effort to pay attention - she spends a whole 39 seconds trying to figure out how to throw a grenade - but gives up to go back to daydreaming.
She’s contemplating another possible first kiss scenario when Carmilla nudges her with her foot, “You’ve been shooting at a wall for five minutes.”

Laura’s eyes widen and she starts to navigate her character, “Uh, sorry. I just don’t really understand how to play this.”

Carmilla taps her foot with again, “You could have just asked.”

They continue to playfully engage in some sort of foot tag and Laura feels her heart pick up. She smiles as she suddenly has an idea, “You know, I think I could actually use some help.”

“Oh.” Carmilla pauses the game, “Literally just shoot the guys that I tell you to. If you want to aim better,” she rotates her controller, “Just push this button.”

“Yeah, but - can you just show me?”

“Well, it’s not like I can physically play for you.”

There has to be a delicate way of implementing this idea. “Okay, spread your legs.”

(Or she could just say that.)

Carmilla’s eyebrows shoot up, “Um, I think you should maybe take me out for crunch wraps first.”

Laura blushes hard and shakes her head, scooting between Carmilla’s legs and settling her back against Carmilla’s chest.

Carmilla laughs into her hair, “Laura, what are you doing?”

Laura grabs Carmilla’s arms and wraps them around her, giving her the controller, “There. Now I can watch what you’re doing.”

“You could have watched from where you were before.”

Laura smiles and leans back, “Yeah, but this is more fun.”

Carmilla laughs again and kisses the top of Laura’s head. She can feel Carmilla’s heartbeat against her back and lets out a contented sigh.

(Shewonders whath it would feel like to be the girl that makes it race.)

She presses further into Carmilla and feels her take another ragged breath.

(Maybe she could be.)

After some time playing - with Carmilla’s assistance, sporadically pressing Laura’s fingers over random buttons - Laura actually starts to get the hang of it. They’re stationed at the top of a building and she manages to launch a grenade, killing a huge group of enemies.

She squeals with excitement, “Oh my God - I did it! Did you see that? I did that - me! I did-” she turns to face Carmilla and the words die in her throat at the sight of her face. She didn’t realize she would be so close. Laura tries to remember who she is, but finds it difficult with the ache in her chest and Carmilla’s lips looking so soft. Laura takes in a quick breath, “I did it.”

“I saw. And I heard you the first three times.”
Laura’s heart is going to shake her entire body. “Yeah.”

“You kicked ass,” Carmilla licks her lips, “It’s actually kinda hot.”

(Holy crap.)

She gulps; her mouth is dry. “You think so?”

“Mhm,” Carmilla looks down at her lips, “Without a doubt.”

Her breathing is shallow and she’s starting to get a kink in her neck from turning like this. Carmilla keeps looking at her lips and the tug in the bottom of Laura’s stomach is starting to get uncomfortable. She could just - go for it. Right now. Why not?

She turns around so that she’s almost completely facing Carmilla and takes a nervous breath.

“Laura,” Carmilla gulps, “I can’t see the screen.”

“I know.”

“Laura…”

She leans in and in trying to steady herself she rests her hand against Carmilla’s hip. She moves back at the sudden look of pain on Carmilla’s face, immediate tears springing to Carmilla’s eyes.

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry.” She studies Carmilla’s face, realization washing over her own, “Carmilla, what happened?”

She shakes her head, “It’s nothing.”

Laura moves back completely so that she’s no longer touching her, “No, something happened. You were fine at school today.”

Carmilla scoffs and runs a hand through her hair, “Laura, it’s fine.”

She thinks of shaky breaths and tense hugs and shrugging away from Laura’s touch. Her face heats - she’s being oblivious again. “Is that why you came here so late?”

Carmilla stares at the ground, “It was just particularly bad tonight.” She sighs, “I didn’t want to worry you but I also didn’t want to stay home and give her another reason to do more.”

Laura’s jaw clenches, “You don’t give her any reason in the first place.”

Carmilla shakes her head slightly, “You know what I mean.”

She doesn’t. And maybe she never well. Laura squeezes her hand, “What can I do?”

“I don’t - I can’t talk about it.”

“I know, baby,” she stills over the word but barrels through with as many words as she can to bury the slip, “I just mean - like, medicine? Ice? Or, I think there might be other stuff in the first aid kit.”

Carmilla looks up at her with shiny eyes and gulps, nodding, “If you have ice, that usually works. And, uh, that ointment you used when I cut myself on your trampoline a while ago.”

Laura feels a lump in her throat and gets up quickly before the tears in her eyes fall.
(She’s not the one who needs comfort right now.)

She runs back as fast as she can with her supplies. Carmilla has moved to the couch, lying across it with a hand over her eyes. Now that Laura isn’t too busy coming up with five-part plans to try kiss her, she can finally notice how uncomfortable Carmilla has been. The rise and fall of her chest is laboured and she looks like she’s trying her hardest not to move. Laura slowly approaches her and can hear Carmilla’s small sniffs as she quickly wipes at her eyes.

Laura clears her throat and Carmilla startles, wiping harder and avoiding Laura’s stare. She struggles to sit up and Laura bends down to help her, “Hey, hey. Easy, I’ve got you.”

Carmilla blows out a deep breath and winces; Laura wonders how much she was keeping inside when Laura basically draped herself on top of her earlier. She frowns and looks down as she sits on the edge of the couch and looks through the first aid kit, “You know, if I was hurting you before by being too close to you, just say so next time.”

“I can never be too hurt with you close to me.”

Laura looks up at her and feels her throat close. She nods - she doesn’t trust her words right now - and passes her a frozen bag of peas, “Um, I couldn’t find anything else. Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Carmilla twists slowly and shoves the bag on the inside of the couch, pressing against it with her body and letting out a long breath.

Laura scoots over in the space Carmilla made for her on the couch, “Where does it hurt?”

“Laura…”

Laura traces the collarbone of Carmilla’s hoodie as Carmilla closes her eyes and shakes her head. She moves her hand slowly until she gets to a spot on her shoulder where Carmilla nods. Laura feels entirely too much at once and leans forward to press a soft kiss to her that spot. She traces down Carmilla’s arm until she gets to her wrist and it elicits another nod. Laura delicately picks up Carmilla’s hand and slowly rolls the end of her sleeve up once, pressing another soft kiss to the inside of her wrist. She laces their fingers together and places them between them.

“I wish I could do more.”

“You do more than enough.”

She doesn’t. “Okay.”

Carmilla slowly flutters her eyes open and turns to face Laura, “I want you to be the only person who takes care of me.”

Laura feels tears prick the corners of her eyes and her heart feels entirely too heavy - a strange mixture of sorrow and affection - and she nods. “Me too.” This is her chance, they don’t have time to tip-toe around this anymore, “And, I know you probably don’t mean it like that, but I’ve realized some things and I need you to know that I-”

“I do mean it.” Carmilla pauses, “Exactly how you’re thinking.”

She looks at Carmilla and can see the truth of the confession swimming in her eyes. “Okay, good.” She musters all of her courage to spill out, “Me too.”

Carmilla nods as she closes her eyes and a sad smile grows on her lips, “I’m kind of tired.”
“Okay. We can head up to bed,” she goes to move but Carmilla squeezes her hand in place.

“Can we just - not move for a while?”

(She’d stay with Carmilla as long as she’d let her.)

“Sure,” Laura lies as still as possible, trying not to press into Carmilla in any way. Carmilla blindly reaches over with her left hand and grabs at Laura’s shirt, pulling her close.

“I’m okay - it’s only my left side, and the peas are already making them feel a bit better.”

Laura doesn’t trust herself but Carmilla is still tugging, so she gently places her arm across her waist. Carmilla intertwines their hand and brings it up to rest against her chest. Laura can feel Carmilla’s heart beat in a quick rhythm against her hand.

(She wanted to be the reason. Maybe her wish isn’t so far off.)

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.

Fool's Gold will begin to update ONCE A WEEK on FRIDAYS 5-6PM EST starting on FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6TH.
You Can See It With the Lights Out

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 18, or the one where if it can go wrong, it probably will.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Abuse Mention, Alcohol & Drug Mention

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing she reaches for when she wakes up is Carmilla, but she's already gone. The bed is cold under Laura’s hand. The second thing she reaches for is her phone.

There's about a billion things she wishes she could say, but it's not like she can tell just anybody how much she suddenly likes her best friend. That's bordering on TMI, and it's also probably really hard to explain.

She unlocks her phone and scrolls to the third most recent text conversation. Maybe she doesn't need someone to listen. Maybe she just needs to make it feel real. She smiles a little as she starts to type in the text box underneath the name Mom :).

Laura (6:37am): sooooo remember the girl i told you about? i kinda really want to kiss her

Laura (6:37am): like... not right now

Laura (6:37am): but soon

Laura (6:39am): i mean, i also want to kiss her right now but its not a good time

Laura (6:50am): and i might be wrong about this but i kind of think she might want to kiss me too

Laura (6:54am): we said some stuff last night and i sort of implied that i liked her like that and she sort of did too but i dont know

Laura (7:12am): i really want to kiss her

—

There’s a door knob-shaped bruise forming in the small of her back — Carmilla can feel it when she leans back against the kitchen counter. She pushes herself up as soon as she feels the sharp stab of pain. Maybe she should just stand for now.

Her fingers wrap around the warm cup of coffee that Laura’s father had given her when they had woken up — no words spoken, just a smile and a silent exchange. He’s good like that, sometimes.

Just like Laura, who bounces down the stairs and into the kitchen a few minutes later. She’s wearing
a dress, the button-up polka dotted one that bunches together at the waist. The fabric looks soft and she looks beautiful. It’s probably the only thing Laura owns that she might consider revealing — only because she has exactly one button undone at the collar. Carmilla tilts her head at her when she pads into the kitchen.

She’s dressed nicer than usual. She’s trying to look good.

“Happy Halloween.”

Carmilla runs through the days of the week in her head. She’d forgotten it was Halloween, and she realizes this will be the first Halloween she doesn’t spend at home.

“You look nice.”

Laura smooths out her dress. “Thanks. You’re up early.” She sets her bag down next to Carmilla’s on the counter. “Usually I have to drag you out of bed on school days. And like, every other day.”

“There was some... bird chirping outside. It woke me up.” Or it could have been the stabbing pain in her side, but she’s giving the nonexistent bird the benefit of the doubt.

“Oh.” Laura nods and purses her lips. She taps the counter beside them and looks down. There’s a tension hanging between them, and she knows Laura is thinking about what happened last night. The part that Carmilla couldn’t tell her.

That doesn’t stop her from diving headfirst into the hope that maybe Laura is thinking about a different part of last night. She has more than enough to hope on.

Laura looks up at her. “Did you have breakfast?”

“No, not yet.”

She turns on her heel to get something from the pantry. “How about some pop tarts? You like blueberry right?”

“Sure.”

They’re laughing over a cartoon on the side of the box when Laura’s Dad comes down the stairs again. Or, Laura is laughing, and Carmilla is trying not to confuse her daydreams from reality when Laura stands so close to her.

“Morning.” He checks something on his phone and then slides it into the pocket of his uniform. Mark adjusts his tie and raises an eyebrow at Laura. Carmilla feels a cold sense of dread sink in when he says, “Laura, do you mind if we talk in my office for a minute?”

She thinks he must be getting curious, either about why she stays over so often or what happened last night, or both. But those options don’t scare her as much as when Laura says, “Yeah, sure,” and they disappear behind his office door with a click.

Carmilla turns to the box of pop tarts to distract herself. She loads two into the toaster and revisits everything they had said the night before.

And, I know you probably don’t mean it like that, but I’ve realized some things and I need you to know —

I do mean it. Exactly how you’re thinking.
That was a lie. She means it more. But at least now she knows that Laura does mean it, on some level. She’ll take what she can get, really. Laura doesn’t owe her a damn thing, and the fact that she feels this way at all is more than she could ask for. It’s a blessing, a literal gift from the God she doesn’t believe in, because she’s tired of asking for things she doesn’t deserve.

When Laura and Mark open the door, she realizes she’s been spacing out. Carmilla pushes down on the lever of the toaster and turns around to see him slip out the door into the garage with a nod and a smile.

“What was that about?” Does she have the right to ask? Maybe not, but she’s never cared about manners before.

The garage door slides open and shut with a groan and they both hear his car start before Laura answers. “He just... he was asking me about last night. He thought you were acting strange.”

She was.

Laura shrugs and takes a few casual steps to close the distance between them. They’ve both given up on the concept of personal space.

“What did you say?”

“I told him you were going through some girl stuff.”

“Girl stuff?”

“Yeah,” Laura rolls her eyes. “Believe it or not, he can be really gullible about that kind of stuff. I don’t know if he totally bought it, but I thought it’d be best if I just didn’t ask.”

She almost smiles. There’s something simple and totally wonderful about the relationship Laura has with her Dad. It’s no wonder Laura is the way that she is — it’s all his doing. She tries not to think about the kind of person that makes her.

“Listen.” Laura tugs lightly on the sleeve of her hoodie, like maybe she knows the reason Carmilla is wearing it has nothing to do with being cold. “If you want to talk about it—”

“I don’t.”

She doesn’t hesitate, just nods. “That’s fine, too. Just. You can, if you wanted to.” Laura lets her fingers drop to her side again. “But I guess you don’t right now, and that’s okay too.” She looks up at her. There’s a more considerable height difference now that Laura is wearing flats and she’s wearing her boots. “I won’t ask.”

Carmilla should have expected more from her. She abandons every argument she had prepared to convince her to drop the subject.

“Thank you.”

Laura nods, and Carmilla feels her own self hatred settle in when Laura starts to crumble. First, her smile goes, and then her lip starts to quiver, and in the time it takes for her eyes to water, Laura nearly tackles her in a hug that knocks the wind out of her. She’s small, but Carmilla can’t pinpoint many parts of her that aren’t sore right now. She brings a hand up to pat Laura’s arm and allows herself to sink into the touch. It’s good for her, even if it hurts.

She must have scared Laura more than she thought last night.
“Hey, I’m gonna be fine, cupcake.”

Laura nods into her shoulder and trails her fingers up and down Carmilla’s back. Carmilla presses her cheek into Laura’s hair and she thinks this might be better than any kiss she’s ever had.

“I know. I just... I know you’re supposed to be a hardass and everything, but.” Laura pulls back and her hands slide down Carmilla’s arms. She holds her just below the elbow, neither of them letting go. “I don’t want you just ignoring it every time you accidentally have feelings, or whatever. You never talk about it and I feel like you bottle stuff up.” She squeezes her arm. “It’s not good for you. Feelings are normal, so.” Her lips tug to the side and she shrugs. “You should feel them.”

If that isn’t a loaded sentence, Carmilla doesn’t know what is.

“I don’t ignore all my feelings.”

Laura isn’t getting it. “I’m sorry, I’m totally prying again aren’t I? I literally just told you that I wouldn’t pry.” She pulls back and wipes away her almost tears in a single gesture. “And here I am, prying. I’m sorry. If you want, from here on out, we can forget the whole night even happened at all.”

_I’ve realized some things and I need you to know that I —

_I do mean it. Exactly how you’re thinking._

_Okay, good. Me too._

Her eyes drift down to where Laura has put her hand on the kitchen counter. Carmilla lets her fingers dance across the wooden top until they graze over Laura’s hand. Laura turns her palm up and meets her eyes. She traces the tip of her middle finger down Laura’s palm and their hands fold into each other.

Carmilla squeezes their fingers together. “Maybe not the whole night.” She chews on her bottom lip so she won’t smile. Too much of a giveaway. They’re close now, a lot closer than she thought.

“Yeah.” Laura grins. “Okay, maybe not the whole night.”

There’s something in Laura's eyes, something like a question. If she's asking what Carmilla wants her to, then the answer is yes, absolutely yes.

Carmilla blinks, licks her lips, and asks "What?"

"Nothing, I just—" Laura doesn't look away from her, she just takes in a breath and holds it. "I just wanted to um..." She shakes her head and Carmilla sees the hint of a smile on her face before she leans in to press a kiss to her cheek.

Laura has a new habit of doing this, and one of these days it'll be the reason Carmilla's heart fails. She doesn't move, but neither does Laura, and that's a development. Her lips linger against her cheek and she can feel Laura’s breath against her skin.

This has to be some kind of sick joke. The universe knows she doesn't have this kind of self control, and this is a personal offense.

Laura is kissing her again — kissing her cheek, and that's not enough, but she's frozen in place as Laura trails kisses in the slowest way possible across her skin. If she turns her head — and if Laura aims her lips a fraction of an inch down — they would be kissing, and that's what makes her heart
race more than anything. That this could happen. That this *is* happening, she can’t even remember when it started happening. Homecoming, maybe. Give or take a few days.

Maybe she’s just an experiment to her. Laura is curious about girls, she can’t blame her for that. Maybe it’s not the best decision she’s ever made, but if the girl she likes feels like using her as a test subject, she’s more than okay with being used.

Except.

*I know you probably don’t mean it like that.*

Laura had said that. She knows, because she memorized every word of that exchange before she had fallen asleep. She had said those exact words, and Carmilla doesn’t quite know how they fit in with this theory. Maybe it doesn’t matter, as long as Laura wants her back, whatever the reason.

Laura presses another kiss, dangerously close to her mouth. And another. And *another*. She’s almost certain that Laura kisses the corner of her mouth (does that even count as a kiss?) when a metallic clang comes from the toaster and they jump apart.

"God damn it." Carmilla curses and nearly punches the toaster — the source of the insufferable sound. Laura laughs, and maybe it is funny, but mostly she just feels like murdering whoever invented the toaster because right now she could have been kissing Laura, but instead Laura is laughing and she’s trying to control her heart rate.

Laura puts some distance between them, and maybe that’s for the best. The tensions evaporates immediately when Laura takes down a plate from the cabinet and presents her with the newly toasted pop tarts.

"Breakfast is served."

"I’ve changed my mind. I hate pop tarts. I wish they’d never existed."

Laura giggles and bites her lip. Good. Not good for her mental health, but good that she knows what just happened. What just almost happened. What should be happening right now if it weren’t for a fucking toaster’s absolute worst timing.

"Sorry, it’s all we’ve got. Plus, you should eat. It helps your body... recover, and all." Laura seems to remember how much pain she’s been in for the last fifteen hours at the same time that Carmilla does. She sighs reluctantly. Maybe now isn’t the best time anyway. But Carmilla has no intention of missing her chance. Laura holds the pop-tart between them, and she’s supposed to take it from her, but instead Carmilla leans down to take a bite of it — why not? It wipes the smile from Laura’s face again. She’s getting good at doing that.

She chews, licks her lips, and scoops her bag off the table. “School?”

"Right, we’re probably gonna miss the bus."

"After you."

—

"Gotcha."

Danny jumps when she feels somebody poke her side, and she doesn’t even have to check who it is. “Can I help you?” She doesn’t look at him, just loads her tray with a carton of orange juice and an
apple — not exactly breakfast, but it’s all they offer at Silas that looks remotely natural.

"Yeah, actually, you could stop avoiding me." He says it with a touch of bitterness, despite the humor in his voice.

She doesn’t blame him, not entirely. She’s saving her blame for other things. Other things that are totally his fault.

Kirsch loads his tray with some suspicious looking breakfast burrito. Danny slides her tray down the line. “I’m not avoiding you, I’m busy."

“That’s bull. You’ve totally been avoiding me since homecoming, and I know it’s because—”

“Don’t.”

This isn’t really a conversation anybody needs to hear. Especially not Big Lottie, who scans her student ID and hands her a napkin.

“Have a nice day.” She says it in that deep tone of hers that tells every single student she hopes they drop dead.

“You too.” Danny nods and takes her tray, but she doesn’t move fast enough, because Kirsch catches up with her before she makes it to the door. She tosses out her styrofoam tray and throws the apple in her bag. Kirsch is right there, but that doesn’t mean she needs to look at anything but her juice box.

“Oh, look, I get it. You don’t wanna talk about it, ‘cause if you do, you’ll end up confessing all your deep passionate feelings for me, and you’ll say you’re in love with me, but I won’t say it back which will just make everything super awkward and you want to avoid all that. I totally get it.”

She stops walking. “Did you get eleven concussions in the last four minutes or something?”

He grins. “No, but I did get your attention.”

She looks around — almost no one is at school, anyway. The buses don’t come for another ten minutes. “Look, I don’t see why there has to be anything to talk about.”

“I know.”

“What?”

He rolls his eyes. “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you, but you keep avoiding me. Just ‘cause we made out, doesn’t mean we need to talk about feelings and stuff. Like, we don’t have to talk about it, just don’t make it weird. If it was weird between me and every girl I ever kissed, I’d be a lonely dude, alright?”

She crosses her arms and decides to not comment on that — it’s probably bullshit. “Are we not talking about what happened or are we not talking at all? Personally, I’m partial to the latter.”

“We could talk. Sometimes, but like— I mean, kissing doesn’t always have to mean something.”

She narrows her eyes. “Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“Yeah, maybe.” He shrugs and shoves his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

“So, you basically want all the benefits of a physical relationship, but you don’t want to put any
effort into the emotional aspects.”

It’s not the worst idea he’s ever had.

“Dude, don’t say relationship, that makes it weird.” Kirsch scratches at the back of his neck. “But like, what do you think?”

She shouldn’t stand here with him much longer, because she can see Maya getting out of her car in the parking lot. “Maybe. If it’s on my terms.”

It’s actually a little tempting. If she compartmentalizes this the right way, it could almost be a good idea. Kirsch is good looking. Kirsch is an okay kisser. Kirsch is willing, and she doesn’t have to put up with shitty dates or annoying late night phone calls. It’s not like she’s dating him.

Maya spots her, and now she definitely needs to leave.

“Look, if I text you a time and place, just. Be there, alright?”

“He looks confused, but she figures that’s just his resting face. Whatever, she doesn’t have the time to care. And technically, she’s not obligated to.

Fine, maybe this is actually a really good idea.

—

Laura (12:51pm): okay. im officially bored.

She’s not bored, she just can’t stop thinking about what almost happened that morning, and what almost happened again after lunch, and what she’s kind of hoping will happen for real sometime soon, so that she can start paying attention in English again.

Carm (12:52pm): texting in class? you’re going to get yourself in trouble

Carm (12:52pm): you’re in english, right?

Laura (12:52pm): yep.

Carm (12:53pm): what book are you reading?

Laura (12:53pm): we’ve been sitting through a lecture on all quiet on the western front

Laura (12:53pm): spoilers: its quiet because everybody’s dead

Carm (12:54pm): sounds like a blast

Laura (12:58pm): soooooo bored

Laura (12:58pm): save me!!!

She gives up texting after a few more minutes, and she tries to stop thinking about kissing, too. Which, by the way — not as easy as it seems. And it makes a number of things really difficult. Paying attention, for one. That’s a lost cause. And she thinks it probably won’t be too long before her common sense goes too, which is bad. She needs common sense. It’s like, the only thing
reminding her that finding her best friend, pulling her out of class, and pushing her up against the first wall she can find is a really bad idea. Possibly the worst idea ever devised by womankind.

Laura tries to focus, and she’s halfway through reading a paragraph about Russians for the nineteenth time — Russians, that’s all she retains — when the classroom door creaks open. Mr. Coleman looks up from the book he’s reading at his pedestal and takes in the scene — twenty students staring at a bored looking Carmilla in the doorway.

“Can I help you?” He sets down the book and stands up straight.

Carmilla frowns at a piece of paper in her hand, and Laura does just about everything she can to get her attention, but she doesn’t meet her eye. “Sorry, I’m looking for a...” She tilts her head to read something on the slip of paper. “Laura Hollis?”

The class turns to look at her, but Carmilla still doesn’t look at anyone but Mr. Coleman. Laura pouts a little, there’s only so much unreciprocated eye contact a girl can offer before she gives up.

“The principal sent me.”

He takes one good look at Carmilla and then nods. “Go on, Laura.”

“Should I take my things?”

Carmilla finally looks at her and she winks in the split second that Mr. Coleman looks away. It’s embarrassing, but she knows she’s probably blushing over it already.

Carmilla shrugs. “She looked angry, it might take a while.”

Okay, that definitely doesn’t sound good. She can’t think of a single thing that she’s done that’s worthy of a personal chewing out from the principal. Unless — no, she wouldn’t be calling her in about Carmilla. If she was, why would she send Carmilla to get her? Does she want to talk to the both of them? She tries to ignore the sweat forming on the back of her neck and the heat flooding her face. She’s not good with punishments. It’s her Dad’s fault, he’s never really scolded her for anything, and it makes getting in any kind of trouble almost terrifying.

Laura packs up her binder and shoves the rest of her books into her backpack unceremoniously.

Carmilla doesn’t do anything else to show that she even recognizes her, so, okay that’s definitely weird. Mr. Coleman just nods at them and returns to his book, along with the rest of the class. He tucks away the piece of paper that Carmilla hands him — a note from the principal, probably. The other students shift back in their seats to doing whatever they were doing before.

Carmilla opens the door for her and they don’t speak until the door is shut and they’re out of sight from the small window in the classroom door.

“What does your Mom need me for?” There’s at least a million explanations running through her mine, and none of them explain why Carmilla is laughing and smiling the way that she is the moment that Laura says this. “What?”

“You’re incredible, you know that?”

Laura frowns. “Wait, what just happened?”

“My Mom doesn’t need you for anything.” Carmilla runs her hand along the wall of lockers as they walk.
“Then why did she make you come g—” It hits her, and Laura’s jaw slides open. “Oh my God, did you just lie to get me out of class?”

She looks up and furrows her eyebrows like she’s remembering something. “I believe your words were ‘save me’, with a lot of exclamation points. It seemed urgent. Possibly dire, I was only concerned.” She grins because they both know how much bullshit she managed to pack into that single sentence.

“Are you skipping class right now?”

“You are too, now.”

She tries to backtrack — there has to be at least a hundred things wrong with a plan like this. “What was the paper you gave him?”

“My Latin homework.”

Whatever the look on her face says, Carmilla reacts to it immediately. “Relax, he won’t even read it. Everyone in this school knows who I am.”

That’s probably true, and she finds comfort in the fact that she can’t think of a single teacher who would be brave enough to double check with Principal Karnstein. She even scares her Dad on parent-teacher nights. Maybe it won’t be totally disastrous.

Also, she feels a little bit rebellious. “You know, I’ve never skipped class before.”

They turn the corner and Carmilla turns around and walks backwards, taking Laura’s hand and leading them into the library. “Glad to be your first.”

—

danny L (1:01pm): Library, 10 mins. 100s.

Kirsch (1:01pm): 100s??

Kirsch (1:01pm): idk what that means

danny L (1:02pm): Dewey decimal system, dumbass.

danny L (1:02pm): It’s the section towards the back.

Kirsch (1:03pm): ohhhh

Kirsch (1:03pm): what about it

danny L (1:04pm): Meet me there, obviously.

—

Laura pulls her knees to her chest to match the way that Carmilla is sitting. They’re tucked in the back corner of the library, their sides almost touching, sharing a pair of headphones. If she stretches out her legs, she could probably reach the bookshelves in front of them.

“Do you ever worry about your Mom seeing us together?” Carmilla frowns, probably because she’s whispering and they’re listening to music at the same time. She says it again a little louder. “You said
your Mom told you not to hang around me anymore, don’t you ever worry that she’ll see us?”

She shakes her head and taps out a beat against her knee. “Not at school.”

“How does that work?”

“How often does she actually show up around this place?”

She has a good point, Laura can only remember seeing her twice in the fourteen months or so that she’s been in high school. Neither of those were exactly pleasant, but she hasn’t stopped imagining what would happen if she saw the principal again, knowing what she knows.

They settle in for another few minutes, and Laura lets herself lean her head against Carmilla’s shoulder.

It’s nice. It’s calm. It makes her ache to kiss Carmilla, but then again, looking at a brick wall seems to have that effect too, these days.

The music changes to something loud and punky, and it totally kills the mood, and kind of hurts her ears. Laura sits up and pulls the earbud out. “Okay, I can’t do it, I’m sorry.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes and takes the earbud from her to put it in her other ear. “Weak.”

She huffs and tugs the headphone out of Carmilla’s ear. “Don’t you have any songs we both like?”

She has Carmilla’s phone in her hand before she can try to stop her, and she scrolls through the list of bands. She recognizes three names out of like, a hundred that she’s never heard of.

“Since when do you listen to Taylor Swift?”

Carmilla’s eyebrows pull together and she glances at the phone. “It’s just one song, I thought it was cool or whatever.”

Laura brings the headphone back to her ear and presses play. A smile stretches across her face as she hears the first few notes. “Isn’t this the song I played for you the other day?”

“Is it?”

“I made you listen to the new album for three hours, this is one of her new songs. It’s existed for like, five days, there’s literally nowhere else you could have heard this song.”

“Huh.”

“You can’t explain your way out of this one without admitting you like Taylor Swift.”

She scoffs. “It’s one song.”

“It’s my fourth favorite song on the album.”

“Yeah, well, it’s the only one I can put up with, so.” Carmilla takes back her phone and turns up the volume to drown out the clearly insulting implication that she might like Taylor Swift.

Laura smiles and narrows her eyes, but she decides to let it go, because Carmilla licks her lips, picks up a paperback, and suddenly Laura has more important things on her mind.

Where she gets the courage to bring this up, Laura doesn’t know. Maybe she’s just tired of not bringing it up. “Okay, I’ve been thinking.”
Carmilla leafs through the pages. “Uh oh.”

“Shut up, it’s serious.” Laura tilts her head to the side, she should probably adjust her definition of ‘serious’. Putting things in perspective, her crush is probably the least of their problems. “Kinda.”

Carmilla toys with the edge of a page before she puts the book down. “Go on.”

“It’s about last night.”

Carmilla tenses and yeah, perspective. She definitely needs some right now.

“No, not about the— It’s not about your stuff. It’s my stuff. Um, our stuff?” She bites her lip and Carmilla smiles like she knows something, which is good because Laura is completely lost here. At least one of them knows what they’re doing.

She puffs out a breath of air and pushes back a strand of hair. “Okay, this morning you said that there was a part of the night that you didn’t want to forget about and I said that there was a part that I didn’t want to forget about but then I got to class this morning and I guess I started thinking about it and I just thought maybe we should clarify that we were both talking about the same thing, ‘cause if we weren’t, then things are probably about to get really awkward really fast—”

She’s grateful for the chance to breathe when Carmilla puts a hand on her knee and squeezes. She smiles. “Cupcake, relax. We were talking about the same thing.”

The tensions slips from her shoulders and she slumps back against the wall. “Right. Okay, yeah, stupid question. In my defense, it seemed a lot more complicated in my head.”

“It doesn’t have to be complicated anymore.”

“Yeah?” It feels complicated, and then Carmilla moves her hand to set it next to Laura’s. Their fingers brush and yeah, maybe things aren’t as complicated as she thought.

Carmilla never gives her an answer, she just fidgets with Laura’s fingers, tracing patterns across her hand. “You never finished what you were saying.”

“What?”

“Last night.” Carmilla turns Laura’s hand over to trace circles into her palm. “You were going to tell me something.”

“You interrupted me.”

“I’m not interrupting you now.”

She tries not to think about how few interruptions they have now, about what could happen today, what could happen right now, if she could keep her nerves in check. She thinks if she kissed her now, Carmilla might even kiss her back. Maybe. Whether she likes her or not, she’s interested. And she knows that Laura’s interested — maybe more than interested.

She almost says it, but she can’t. “Shut up, you know.”

She does, Laura can see it in the way she smiles.

A student they don’t recognize ducks into the aisle to get a book, and they both split apart. She hadn’t realized how close they were sitting until Carmilla pushes herself away. She positions herself to face Laura, crossing her legs and fidgeting with her hands until the other student finds what he
needs and leaves. Carmilla watches him until he does. Laura watches Carmilla. She pouts a little when it dawns on her that she’s probably shifting because she’s in pain. More pain than she’s letting on, that’s for sure. Laura knows pain is relative and everything she feels when Carmilla lets her see that she’s hurt is nowhere near the kind of pain Carmilla feels on a regular basis, but still. It hurts to know. It hurts to remember a hundred times a day.

Carmilla looks at her again when the student leaves, and she’s not smiling, but there’s something there. Like expectation or anticipation. Laura feels it too, in the pit of her stomach. And her mouth is definitely plotting against her — and itself, really, because she’s reminded again that they could totally be kissing right now if she could just pull herself together. It has to happen soon, mostly because if it doesn’t, they’re always going to be tense around each other.

Also, she’s pretty sure that if it doesn’t, she might explode.

But, still, her mouth hates her, because the song shifts to something she actually does recognize — some Arctic Monkeys song, and before Carmilla can say anything to continue the conversation, Laura starts talking.

“Do you know how to play this on guitar?” She wants to delete those words from her vocabulary permanently, because they’re getting in the way of a totally perfect moment, thanks to her idiot brain.

Carmilla looks just as disappointed as Laura feels. “Probably.”

“You still haven’t played anything for me on guitar.”

Holy crap, stop talking.

“You haven’t played anything for me on the flute, either.”

Laura rolls her eyes. “Please, it’s a band instrument. There’s nothing remotely sexy about the flute.”

Carmilla smiles, probably because she did just accidentally call her sexy. Whatever. It’s not a lie.

“I don’t know, there’s probably something sexy about playing the flute. Flute players must be really good with their mouths.”

Laura feels her mouth hang open a little, because okay then. She could work with this. “I don’t know if that’s entirely true.”

Stop talking!

“I guess there’s only one way to find out.” That’s a hint. That’s a big hint. It was a sign, it would probably be blinking and technicolor. So, yeah, they’d almost kissed this morning, but she had somehow convinced herself that maybe she had imagined it. It felt too coincidental that Carmilla had started liking her the moment Laura realized she had a crush on her. That was too easy. Way too easy, like this moment right now, when Carmilla hand delivers the most obvious invitation to a kiss she might ever get in her life.

She doesn’t take it.

She doesn’t take it, because she’s frozen — head to toe. Carmilla leans in a little and Laura has enough brain power to think that she should probably lean in too. She tries to shift forward enough to get the right angle, but she overshoots and their foreheads meet. All she has to do is push forward. Their lips are so close, and Carmilla's eyes are questioning — maybe they're asking why this is taking so long. Laura wants an answer to that too, but her heart is pounding too loudly for her mind
to be remotely rational about this.

Carmilla takes the initiative — Thank God — and she shifts closer, keeping their heads in the same place and bringing their bodies closer. Laura can feel her breath quickening — Carmilla's is doing the same and she's pretty sure she has to get over her nerves soon and kiss her or else she might actually die.

She’s about to surge forward when a voice that she recognizes as Danny’s articulates her exact thoughts.

“Fuck, shit.”

A few books fall to the ground from the other side of the shelves in front of them. Laura and Carmilla jump apart and slump back against the wall, Laura resisting the urge to groan, and Carmilla clenching her fist and shutting her eyes.

She catches a flash of red hair through the shelves and clears her throat. "Danny?" Maybe if she doesn't respond, they can just ignore each other.

She doesn't get that lucky, and Carmilla actually does groan when another voice chimes in. It's Kirsch.

"Relax, it's only Laura."

She can't see through the shelves of books, but Laura hears a hand come up to smack the back of his head.

"Ow, not cool."

She'll feel bad about thinking he deserves it some time later, when her mind decides to stop hating her and let herself enjoy a kiss. It's just a kiss, for Pete's sake, why is she so nervous?

Danny asks, "How is that a good thing?" and Carmilla runs her hand through her hair, tugging at the sides of it.

Not fair.

Laura bites her lip and stares a little. The kissing opportunity is definitely gone, and Carmilla must know it, because she looks a little homicidal.

It's good to know she's not alone in that.

Laura’s heart rate is starting to slow down again when Kirsch rounds the corner of the aisle.

“Hey, ladies.” He nods. “What’s up?"

Carmilla narrows her eyes. “We were clearly discussing Marxism, what does it look like?”

“Oh. That’s cool. I was uh, I was just checking out a book.” He picks up a book from the shelf and waves it in front of him. It’s the M volume of the encyclopedia.

Carmilla rolls her eyes. “Well, it’s a good read.”

“Totally.” His face flushes when he reads the cover, and Kirsch tucks the book behind back quickly.

Danny comes around the aisle in the next second, and Laura would get more frustrated by the second
if she wasn’t so confused. The blue plaid that she was wearing that morning is missing three of its buttons, and her tank top is untucked.

And Kirsch has never been an actor, but she gives him an A for effort. “Oh, Danny. Hey, funny running into you here.”

Carmilla scoffs louder than Danny and starts to wrap her headphones around her phone.

Kirsch snaps his fingers. “Oh, you know what would be like, super cool? We all have sixth period together, why don’t we hang out here for a while and then go to class together? Since we’re here on a total coincidence.”

He’s trying, but Laura doesn’t have it in her to go along with it, nor does she have it in her to ask why he’s trying so hard in the first place — she’ll figure it out later. Carmilla and Danny lock eyes and for the first time, Laura watches them agree with each other.

Danny shakes her head. “I don’t think that necessary.”

“As much as I’d love to be the Four Musketeers, I think I actually need to go vomit.” She tosses her phone into her bag and slings it over her shoulder when she pushes herself off the carpet.

Laura doesn’t waste any time, gathering her own things together and offering Kirsch and Danny an awkward wave. “Sorry, I should probably — yeah.”

She doesn’t exactly chase her, per say. Carmilla isn’t making it difficult for her to follow, but she doesn’t look back at her until they’re out of the library. She leans back against the nearest wall of lockers and sighs, closing her eyes.

“I’m going to murder your friends.”

Laura rolls her eyes. “Yeah, tell me about it. I think I might help you bury the bodies.” She takes a couple of steps forward until they’re close — close like they were this morning. Close like they were a minute ago.

Laura looks down between them and controls the urge to hold Carmilla’s hand. That will only lead to wanting to do something they can’t. Not right now. She can’t even begin to count all the things that could go wrong with kissing Carmilla in a school hallway. A secluded area of the library is one thing, this is another.

But the moment isn’t gone. It hangs in the air. It lingers between them in the way that her heart pounds and Carmilla licks her lips and Laura can’t stop staring at her mouth.

“We should go to class.” Carmilla says.

“Yeah.” She nods — They should do whatever it takes to put some distance between them right now. “Class, definitely.”

—

He doesn’t pay attention much in health class. They’re learning about the benefits of abstinence — they all have pamphlets on their desks, and he feels like maybe somebody should be mentioning the irony of preaching abstinence after a week long lecture about how to have safe sex. He zones out after the first few minutes, because Mr. Beckett’s voice is boring as hell and honestly, abstinence is the last thing on his mind.
Like, the *very* last thing.


No. No, that’s definitely not helping. That’s definitely the root of this problem. He presses a binder against his lap and tries to adjust to alleviate some kind of tension. It doesn’t work.

Kirsch tries actually listening to Beckett’s lecture, and somewhere between a lengthy list of STDs and a vivid description of herpes, he manages to calm himself down.

Thank God.

When the bell rings, he’s totally got this under control, and that’s definitely best, because the class files out until it’s just Kirsch, Danny, and Mr. Beckett. Danny finishes scribbling down whatever notes she’d been taking — oh shit, is there a test on this? Whatever, he’ll deal with that later. Kirsch takes his time packing up his things while Beckett eyes the two of them and gives Kirsch a suspicious look for good measure before he takes his briefcase and leaves the room.

He throws his backpack over his shoulder and hops a row of desks. “So, are you coming by my place tonight?”

Danny piles her notes together and slides them into her backpack. “Why would I do that?”

“I have a killer halloween party every year. It’s gonna be awesome, I might even get Sam to let me pull fake sausages out of him or something.”

She zips up her bag. “I don’t know. We’ll see.” She gives him a curious look. “We’re not dating, though. Don’t get the wrong idea.” She sweeps a stack of textbooks off of the desk and into her hands.

“Dude, ew, obviously not.” He doesn’t get why she keeps saying stuff like that. “I was just saying, it’d be cool if you came. ‘Cause everyone else is gonna be there.”

“And what? We could make out in your basement?” It’s the smile on her face that tells him they’re really alone. She never smiles like that unless it’s just them.

“What? No.” Actually, he doesn’t want that offer totally off the table. “I don’t know.”

“We’re not dating.”

He’s seriously gonna start a drinking game or something if she keeps saying that for no reason.

He rolls his eyes and let’s his tone get a little aggressive, it feels more like them if they’re arguing, anyway. “I know that.”

She shrugs. “Good, you better.”

“Well, I do.”

“Great.”

“Amazing.”

Danny drops her books at the same time that Kirsch reaches for her sides. Her hands grip at the back
of his neck and he's shocked at how easily she lets him take control. Except, maybe not, because he kind of feels like she has him exactly where she wants him and not an inch out of place. Kirsch moves his hands to her hair, and he lets her do something with her tongue that he hasn't found words to describe yet. It's hot. She's hot.

Danny's kiss is bruising, but it's also short-lived. She pushes against his chest and he lets go of his grip on her. Their breathing is uneven and he tries to get his bearings again. School. Health class. The bell is going to ring any second now.

“I have to get to class.” Danny picks up her books again and pushes past him.

Kirsch groans.


—

Laura keeps the piece of paper they had been passing notes on. It has some pretty cute doodles on it, and maybe she wants to read it again later.

She reads it again now, just before the bell rings. Her handwriting is neat.

You're not paying attention.

Carmilla's handwriting is messier, but it makes her feel like she's barely graduated grade school. Laura has a working theory that Carmilla hand wrote the Declaration of Independence, with handwriting like hers.

I'm paying attention to you.

Laura smiles and slips the piece of notebook paper into her bag before the bell rings.

Carmilla follows her into the hallway and Laura almost lets her leave for Latin, but she grabs her by a finger and tugs her towards her locker.

"Give me two seconds, I have to get my books from my locker."

Her eyebrows furrow and she leans back against the locker next to hers. "It's a Friday."

"I know, and you can still stay over, obviously." They always do on Friday nights, and that sends a brand new wave of butterflies to her stomach. They spend a lot of unsupervised hours together on Friday nights.

Alone.

Together.

Part of her wants to skip over the next six hours and get to the alone part, but part of her feels like she might throw up if she does. Is Carmilla this nervous? She hopes so.

"I just need to do some studying this weekend, I'm starting to get behind in some of my classes," Laura clumsily collects her books, shaking her bag to make more room for them.

Carmilla smiles. "Have I been too distracting lately? Do you need me to stay away for a while so you can function properly?"
Yes. Sidenote, when did they start flirting so much? More importantly, is she any good at flirting?

"Jeez, try not to flatter yourself too much, you'll pull a muscle." Her zipper gets stuck because she’s barely paying any attention to what she’s doing.

“Don’t need to, that’s what I have you for.”

It unsticks, and Laura shuts her locker, swinging her backpack over her shoulder. It’s significantly heavier now, and she hooks her thumbs underneath the straps of it. She bites the corner of her bottom lip around a smile.

“And that’s the only reason you keep me around, huh?”

“There might be a few other reasons.”

Maybe Laura should be thinking about the people around them — her friends, her teachers, Carmilla’s mother (unlikely, but maybe is enough to scare her) — she hasn’t told anyone but Carmilla that she likes girls, and yet here she is. Reaching out to hook her index finger around Carmilla’s ring finger, holding her in place much closer than either of them need to be.

“The bell is going to ring.” Carmilla looks up at the clock over the lockers across the hall.

“Wait—” She wishes she knew where she was going with this, but she doesn’t. Not really. “Uh, Halloween officially starts at 7pm tonight.” That works.

“Oh? I thought it started at 12:01 this morning.” She tilts her head. “You do know how days work, right?”

Their hands are still connected, and Laura swings them a little. “No, no, no, you’re misunderstanding. Hollis halloweens are legendary, and they start at 7pm on the dot. Everyone’s gonna meet at my house and then we go trick or treating around the block and probably hang out at Kirsch’s for a while.”

“Seven?”

“Mmhm.” She nods. “So, you can show up at six if you want.”

Her heart picks up speed again — sixty minutes is definitely more than enough time for kissing. Maybe a lot of kissing.

The warning bell rings, and Laura has been ignoring the fact that she has class in literally one minute, but now she has sixty seconds to book it to the band room. She surges forward and presses a quick kiss against Carmilla’s cheek — there’s something for her to think about for the next three hours. “Don’t be late. Wear something cute.”

She catches a smile on Carmilla’s face as she walks away, and they keep their fingers together as long as possible, until Laura takes one too many steps — she is so gonna be late for class — and Carmilla’s hand drops back to her side.

Thirty seconds to get to the band room. Possibly less. And it’s on the complete other side of the campus.

—

Maybe she should give up trying to understand Laura Hollis entirely.
Wear something cute. Wear something cute, said the girl Carmilla had almost kissed at least a dozen times today. Wear something cute, said the reason she had changed four times before she left the house that afternoon. Wear something cute, said Laura, without even the slightest mention that she was expected to wear a costume.

“I don’t understand why this can’t be a costume. You’re wearing normal clothes, too.” Maybe normal is a stretch. She’s wearing an outdated tweed jacket and a red bowtie. It’s normal for someone.

“I’m not wearing normal clothes, this is my costume. I’m the eleventh doctor.”

“What happened to the first ten?”

Laura laughs. “it’s a long story, trust me.”

Carmilla leans her forearms against the island counter in the kitchen. “I still don’t see why I need a costume, this is a stupid holiday.”

Laura checks the time on her phone and bites her lip. (She keeps doing that.)

“It’s not a stupid holiday, it’s a great holiday. And you’re gonna have a great costume.”

They both stand up straight when Mark comes into the kitchen with a sigh.

“Tell no one where you got this,” He says, handing Laura a police uniform. “I’m breaking at least fifteen rules giving this to a civilian.”

Laura wraps him in a hug and says, “Thanks, Daddy,” and Carmilla doesn’t have it in her to comment on how Laura has him wrapped around her little finger.

“Yeah, yeah.” He looks at the uniform in his daughter’s hands and he looks pained. “Just make it look like you got it at a halloween store. I’m throwing you under the bus and saying you stole it if any of the guys from the station ask me about it.”

“Relax, it’ll be fine.”

Carmilla pushes herself off the counter and takes the uniform shirt from the pile in Laura’s hands. She puts it on over her sweater — it’s way too big, but she thinks it’ll still fit.

Laura folds down the collar of the shirt and pats her shoulders. “You know what, why don’t we get you changed in the bathroom, that way I can do your make up?”

Her Dad frowns. “Make up? For a Sheriff’s costume?”

Laura rolls her eyes. “No, I was thinking we could make her like... a zombie cop.” She rifles through her purse on the table. “It’ll be totally original, she’ll be like a cop who turned into a zombie and obviously didn’t care enough to change into civilian clothes now that all she wants to eat is brains.”

Mark holds his hands up in surrender like he couldn’t understand Laura if he tried, and Laura gives her a look that says that maybe this isn’t about the makeup at all, so she agrees, following her into the bathroom.

The door shut behind them with a click, drowning out the hum of the air conditioner that comes from the vent in the kitchen. Everything is quiet and everything is tense.
“So, we probably don’t want to get makeup on his uniform.” Laura unzips her make up bag and pulls out a few things at a time.

Carmilla doesn’t move, she waits to say something until Laura motions for her to move closer and starts to undo the buttons on her shirt — Mark’s shirt, either way, Laura is undressing her, even if she does have clothes on underneath still.

“Having fun? I didn’t know we did this now.” She raises an eyebrow and revels in the way Laura squirms a little bit. She recovers quickly.

“Fine.” Laura pushes the shirt off her shoulders and drops it on the bathroom counter, doing nothing to fix the lack of personal space between them. “What do we do now, then. If you’re the expert?”

She couldn’t explain how ready she is for this moment if she tried.

“Is the door locked?”

Laura shakes her head and Carmilla almost doesn't care. She almost lunges forward to force a kiss to Laura's unsuspecting bottom lip before she can bite into it one more time — everytime she does, Carmilla thinks she might die.

She doesn't do that. She reaches a hand behind her to flip the switch on the door handle, and it locks in place with a soft click. Laura's mouth hangs open just enough to test her self control a little more. They should hand out medals for the kind of patience Carmilla has.

There's a tug to the corner of Laura's lips, like she could be smiling if she wasn't losing her mind. Carmilla can sympathize. She laces their fingers together the way they were when they waltzed at homecoming, using that hand to pull Laura towards her. One tug — sudden and firm and suddenly Laura is pressed against her and every trace of a smile is gone from her lips.

Her presence is distracting, the kind that Carmilla wants. Distractions help her forget the dull ache at the small of her back and stinging pains in her side. Every touch from Laura distracts, and she wonders what it's like to be Laura. To want this for reasons that aren't selfish or tainted.

Laura looks at her lips and then their eyes meet and she can see it in her eyes before she hears it — the nervous rant that she's about to hear if she doesn't stop it before she gets going.

"Don't say anything." Carmilla would still want to kiss her if she felt it necessary to recite the ingredients of a Big Mac right here and now, but at this rate, after this much anticipation, kissing Laura might mean the end of her life.

And she really doesn't want the last thing she hears to start with the words two all beef patties.

Laura nods. "Yeah, okay."

"You're still talking."

"Well, you're not exactly giving me something else to be doing." She looks down between them, even if there is no between them. Their chest are pressed together and their hands are still intertwined.

"I guess you're gonna make me work for it, then."

Carmilla brings up her other hand to hold Laura in place by both hands. She tilts her head to lean in, and she's still waiting for somebody to interrupt, for something to stop them. This is too easy.
She's right.

The doorbell rings when she's less than an inch from Laura's mouth — both her hands squeeze roughly against Laura's and she snaps out of the spell.

"What is it?"

Laura hadn't heard it, and maybe that means she can still pull this off. Or maybe this is her own personal Groundhog Day, except instead of reliving a boring day in the life of Carmilla Karnstein, she has to keep reliving the same torturous almost kiss until she gets it right. Until she gets it perfect. She can hear Mark talking to somebody — she recognizes the voice as LaFontaine's. With Laura's friends less than twenty feet away, this is less than perfect. Laura deserves perfection.

"The doorbell rang."

"Did it?" Laura blinks, and she must hear her Dad's voice. "Oh." The disappointment pours through her body in half a second, her shoulders slumping and her head bowing.

"Hey." Carmilla pulls apart their hands so she can tilt Laura's chin up. "Soon."

Laura smiles. "Yeah?"

She nods. "If I have anything to do about it." The voices are getting closer now, so Carmilla pulls back to put some space between them while she can still remember why she needs to.

Laura looks between her and the door and back to her — Jesus Christ, she has got to stop biting her lip like that. She's frozen. Torn.

"Go. They're probably waiting for you." She steps around Laura now, messing with the make up supplies on the sink. "I can turn myself into a zombie cop. I'm pretty good with make up, you know."

She hopes that didn't come out sad, considering the implications behind those words, but she doesn't bother to see the look on Laura's face. If she looks at her with those eyes again, Carmilla might die.

Laura lingers. She puts a hand on the bathroom sink, within Carmilla's peripheral, and presses against her shoulder to turn her around. Carmilla almost hisses in pain — that shoulder should be in pain for days — and Laura pulls her hand back like she's touched fire.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine."

"I just..." Laura brings her hand up to run her fingers through Carmilla's hair. "You know I want to kiss you, right?"

It takes a moment for it to fully sink in that those are actual words she's hearing from Laura Hollis' mouth. She laughs, leaning into Laura's hand. "I sort of worked that one out on my own, actually."

"Right." Laura pulls back her hand. "Right, good."

The noise outside the door is getting louder and closer, but she can't find it in her not to gravitate towards Laura when she leans in. She stops when their foreheads touch and they're practically breathing into each others mouths, like they both know this can't happen right now. Or it can, but it won't, but they both need to inform their bodies of that fact.
Honestly, this girl is going to be the death of her.

"I just wanted to... to make that clear." She whispers. "That I want this." Laura laughs softly and Carmilla's brain nearly melts at the sound when it's so close to her own lips. "Probably more than you do."

She doesn't hesitate. "Not a chance".

Laura smiles and pulls back a little to take in the look on her face — looking for something. All she finds is the honest truth, because it's all Carmilla lets her see. "Oh."

"You should go, though."

"Right." She doesn't move.

"Laura, you're killing me."

That eases the tension enough, and Laura finally pushes herself away, leaning back on her heel to reach for the door handle. Carmilla breathes a sigh of relief.

She shifts back into the Laura she knows well. "Zombie cop. Make it look good."

"Anything you say."

Laura smiles and slips through the door, leaving Carmilla to lean against the counter for support.

Her mind is clouded and it takes her a few seconds to remember what she’s actually supposed to be doing. Right. Halloween.

It’s never really crossed her mind, but she guesses that uniforms change depending on rank or division or however police departments work, because Mark’s uniform is a little bit different than the ones she’s used to seeing on TV. Or anywhere else. She takes her shirt off quickly, not bothering to look in the mirror. She had checked earlier, she knows how bad it is. The shirt has short sleeves, so she’ll have to ask Laura for some kind of jacket before her Dad can notice the red marks just above her elbows.

The uniform pants are too long, but she tightens the belt and tucks the khaki shirt into it. Laura is expecting a zombie cop, so she should probably leave the tie alone and keep a few of the buttons undone, but she’s curious for some reason, and she humors herself. Carmilla buttons up the top buttons and slips the tie around her neck, tying it with practiced ease. She tightens it and stands up straight, looking in the mirror as she pushes her hair into a quick bun to get it out of the way.

It’s different. But maybe not a bad different. It could even be a good different. Uniforms are powerful. Authority is powerful. Power is corrupt, but Mark has that same power and she knows if anyone on earth handles it well, it’s him.

For the first time in her life, standing in Laura’s bathroom, wearing her father’s uniform, Carmilla feels like maybe she could handle that kind of power too.

—

“I feel like there’s something wrong with this picture.” LaFontaine swings their bag of candy, barely being careful enough not to hit Perry while they walk. “Shouldn’t I be the scientist?”

“You pull off the stitches and face paint better than I do.” Perry touches their hair — it’s even more
manic than it usually is, thanks to more hair gel than any one person should ever have in their hair. “And your hair is more Frankenstein than mine.”

“Frankenstein’s monster.”

Perry rolls her eyes. “You know what I mean.”

They do. LaFontaine smiles and bumps their bag of candy into Perry’s side. “I like you in a labcoat, though. It’s kinda hot.”

And Perry is right — they’re much better as Frankenstein’s monster than Frankenstein. Perry wouldn’t touch face paint if her life depended it, and she still refuses to kiss them now that their face is covered in the stuff. They think it’s ironic that they’re posing as someone who is barely put together tonight. They feel the opposite. LaFontaine isn’t falling apart anymore, and for once it feels like things are actually going right. And yeah, they’re a little high. Maybe more than a little, but it’s good for them, because now they can finally relax and just enjoy a night with Perry and their other friends.

Carmilla and Laura are so wrapped up in each other that they don’t even notice when LaFontaine nearly lands face first into a row of bushes after tripping over a rock in the street. Perry catches them by the arm and they both giggle, but LaFontaine doesn’t stop laughing for a long while.

“What’s with you tonight? You haven’t been like this in a long time.” Perry rubs a hand down their arm as they trail behind Laura and Carmilla.

“What, I can’t have a great time anymore? Just ‘cause life is shitty doesn’t mean I have to mope around all the time.” To be fair, they usually do a lot of moping, so Perry has a point.

She frowns — probably at the reference to their shitty lives — and they make it their mission to fix that frown.

Fix that frown. Turn that frown upside down. Ha ha.

"Okay, okay, I have an idea."

Perry knows their idea, she raises an eyebrow and crosses her arms.

"Come on, Halloween is boring. Kissing is fun". They should probably keep their voice down.

Perry chews on her lip. There’s a smile there, but LaFontaine doesn’t get to see it until she relents and steps a little closer.

She’s intoxicating.

"What do we tell Laura and Carmilla?"

"That we ran off to join the circus. Or work for NASA, who cares? They're not listening." They aren't wrong. "Watch." LaFontaine hooks a thumb over their shoulder to point at nothing. "Hey, L, we’re gonna take a detour and go to the IHOP in California."

Laura’s reaction is delayed, because she has to pull herself away from whatever conversation she's having with Carmilla. When she does, she smiles, nods, and offers up an, "Okay, have fun!"

Perry takes their hand just and follows LaFontaine as they drag her behind a wooden shed in someone's backyard. They can’t tell if Perry is suddenly more relaxed about barely-public displays of
affection, or if they're just not paying enough attention to notice. They should focus more.

They focus on Perry. She's beautiful.

"I love it when you're in a good mood." Perry smooths down nonexistent wrinkles in their shirt.

"I'm always in a good mood around you."

Perry smiles sadly, they both know that isn't totally true, but it's the thought that counts. Their lives have never been full of happiness, they've never been completely full of anything. What they have is not enough, it's got gaps and black holes and negative space — LaFontaine knows this better than Perry, if only because they have a firmer grasp of science and what those things mean in the real world. Their world, too. But Perry isn't blind to it.

They kiss to forget the emptiness.

—

Carmilla actually did a pretty good job on her make up, even if she’s less of a zombie cop and more of a pale, well put together zombie cop with winged eyeliner. They follow LaFontaine and Perry around the block — Perry had produced a color coded map of which houses they should hit, and when, organized by general hospitality, distribution, and size of candy bars.

LaFontaine and Perry leave to take a detour — she hadn’t really paid attention to the reason they had told her, because Carmilla was talking and Laura was almost exclusively staring at her lips.

When they leave, Carmilla takes Laura’s hand, and it’s kind of unspoken — or actually, it might be spoken now, since she’d basically told her in the bathroom. Unspoken or not, there’s something happening between them, and it feels a little fast but also way too slow, because she kind of wants to just kiss her in the middle of the street but there’s no delicate way of doing that. Carmilla seems content just walking beside her.

Laura does a lot of smiling on their way to Kirsch’s house.

And a lot of smiling at Kirsch’s house.

But not so much smiling when they reach the row of halloween themed carnival games on his lawn, because Kirsch’s idea of bobbing for apples it a garbage can filled with water and every piece of fruit he could find — one of which happened to be a cherry, and because Carmilla has a personal vendetta against Laura’s self control, she decides to show her just how easily she can tie a cherry stem with her tongue.

Which is just totally not fair. She tells her that much.

“You did that on purpose.”

Carmilla tosses the cherry behind her. “Did I?”

“Yes, and that was mean.” Does she sound childish? Probably. But, she’s not wrong.

“Was it? Huh.” Carmilla smiles down at her and it makes something in her chest do that really unstable flutter that it keeps doing. “Sorry, it’s been kind of a long day.”

She almost congratulates her for winning the Understatement of the Year award.

“Tell me about it.” Laura hooks her finger around Carmilla’s pinky. “Maybe it doesn’t have to be a
long night, though.”

Carmilla catches on to the implication quickly, and that’s good. She almost didn’t survive admitting what she wanted in the bathroom. She almost doesn’t survive the moment that they slip behind Kirsch’s house and Laura leans back against his fence. The noise of the party is muffled from this side of the house, and there’s less light. Carmilla runs a hand through Laura’s hair.

She goes for it, or she almost does, except Carmilla steps back just when she steps forward and Laura tries not to overthink that because if she does, things get complicated. She just wants to kiss her crush.

“Wait.”

“What’s wrong.”

“Nothing.” Carmilla touches the bowtie Laura has on. “I just— I have an idea.”

—

Her idea is a park. They almost don’t make it, because there’s a bridge and a bench and a few other secluded areas on the way and Laura tries to kiss Carmilla every chance she gets. Carmilla almost gives in when she tries for the last time, but all Laura gets is a hand on her side and a clumsy kiss to her hair when Carmilla assures her it’s not much further.

Not kissing Carmilla is painful, and she thinks this has to be the most pain she’s ever felt. But not kissing her is also really fun, in a really frustrating way. All the romantic comedies she’s seen a thousand times were so wrong. Dramatic build ups are nothing compared to this. This is agonizing and she kind of loves it.

She was right though, it isn’t much further. Laura’s heart melts a little when she sees the playground — it’s not much of one, just a swing set with four swings and a slide — but she smiles when she sees it. Laura takes Carmilla’s hand. “You are a complete sap, you know that?”

“You wish.” Carmilla pulls her onto the playground, the sound of their footsteps changing when they cross from grass to wood chips.

“So, what’s this all about, then?” She runs her hand down the chain of the swing and waits for whatever excuse Carmilla wants to give her — she’ll take anything she says with a grain of salt at this point. Carmilla doesn’t have to talk for Laura to know what she’s saying.

Carmilla lowers herself into the swing next to Laura’s. Laura pushes the seat behind her so that they can face opposite directions. She thinks this is how you’re supposed to do it, anyway. Carmilla grips at the chains of the swing and looks up at the sky. “I come here a lot. To look at the stars.” It’s another one of the ways that Laura never knows what to expect from her. She hasn’t taken her eyes off of Carmilla long enough to remember there still is a sky. “It’s comforting. To think how small we are in comparison. All the lives we’ll lead. People we’ll be. Things that we’ve... done. Nothing to that light.”

Laura can’t help but shake her head. She looks up to take in the stars. The sky is clear and she can feel a light breeze against her skin, which sends a shiver down her spine, except she’s wearing a jacket so, right — maybe it has nothing to do with the breeze. When she looks down again, Carmilla is looking at her.

Laura shakes her head again. “You’re amazing, you know that? You act like a total cynic all the time.” She nudges Carmilla’s boot with her foot. “But... you look at the stars and you see — well,
you see more than I do.”

She doesn’t miss the way that Carmilla’s chest rises and falls a little quicker than usual. That’s good. She’s nervous too — or maybe excited. Laura can’t figure out which emotion she’s leaning towards. Maybe she created a new one.

“And what do you see when you look at the stars?”

“If I’m lucky, I can usually find the big dipper.”

Laura doesn’t see it coming, but maybe she should have. Carmilla tugs on the chain of her swing and suddenly they’re close again, for the hundredth time today, but it’s different. It’s heavy. It’s intimate. It’s the reason Laura is finding it a little difficult to breathe right now.

“Sorry.” She doesn’t look that sorry. “I’m just getting a little tired of waiting.”

Laura can definitely sympathize.

“This is supposed to be the part where you... say something romantic and then, uh.” She chuckles, but it’s low and soft. There’s not a lot of humor to this, unless she counts the fact that there seems to be a direct correlation between how terrible she is at constructing full sentences while inches from Carmilla’s mouth. “And then you’d show me the stars. I still don’t know where the big dipper is.”

Carmilla’s eyes lock with hers. “I didn’t bring you here to show you the stars.”

She knows that.

As if she even needs to ask, Carmilla looks at Laura’s lips and then her eyes, waiting for some kind of signal. She can hear her heart pounding in her ears, but she nods. Carmilla tilts her head and Laura licks her lips just as they start to lean in.

“Is it okay if I’m nervous?”

Pounding. Her heart is pounding and she hopes that Carmilla can’t hear it.

“That’s okay.”

She tries to keep her breathing under control. “Okay.” It takes her almost too long to notice that Carmilla stalls after that. Or maybe time is just passing at an excruciatingly slow pace, either way, they’re fixed in place.

She knows Laura is nervous, and now Carmilla is letting her take control of this. She’s giving her the space to do what she’s comfortable with. It’s sweet of her, Laura should have known she’d do something like this. Of course she’d make this perfect. Of course she’d do the exact thing that makes Laura fall a little harder.

Part of her wants to stop, pull back, and tell Carmilla every little detail that she adores about her so that maybe she’ll feel as special as Laura does right now. It’s safe to say that part of her doesn’t win out.

She kisses her instead.

The first kiss is her favorite. The first kiss is everything. Carmilla’s lips are soft and magnetic — she kisses her like she’s coming up for air, like she’ll miss something if they don’t stay like this for hours. Carmilla pulls back for a fraction of a second to tilt her head and kiss her harder, but it doesn’t feel
like enough. She captures Laura’s bottom lip and Laura hums into her mouth. She thinks it’s what makes Carmilla smile against her mouth, and she’s too preoccupied to feel embarrassed about it, so she just smiles back until they’re both smiling and that kind of ruins the whole kissing thing they’ve got going on, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t the best kiss probably *anyone* has ever had.

Laura tries to squeeze in a few more kisses before they pull back — a few pecks to her lips that leave her smiling and Carmilla trying not to laugh. It falls apart quickly, the kiss. Kisses, whatever. They all feel like the first kiss to her.

Carmilla leans her head against Laura’s hair and bites her lip.

Laura laughs. “That wasn’t so bad.”

“You really know how to give a girl a compliment.”

Yeah, she could have said literally *anything* but that. But it’s totally unfair to hold her accountable for anything she says or does right now. “No, I just meant—” She resists the urge to kiss her again instead of explaining. “I was nervous. I guess it felt like a bigger deal in my head.”

She nods. “Alright, so far I’ve got ‘not so bad’ and ‘not a big deal’.”

“Oh, shut up.” Laura kisses her again to make sure that she does, and it works well. She thinks she’ll be using that trick a lot from now on. “It was amazing.” She adds, between two more kisses. Carmilla has to know it was amazing, there’s no way that she doesn’t. *She was there*. It was phenomenal. It was the kind of thing people write love songs about.

“Agreed.” Carmilla presses another kiss to her lips, and then her hand finds Laura’s hair and she deepens the kiss. Laura almost falls off her swing — it’s a close call, because the way Carmilla’s lips are moving against hers is making her forget all the essential things. Breathing. Not falling. Those are the two things she tries to focus on, but it really doesn’t work.

It feels like it doesn’t matter, though. She has plenty of time to practice.

Laura smiles into the kiss.

—

He knows his Mom won’t be home anytime soon, Halloween is always a busy night at the hospital, but Kirsch tells everyone the exact opposite, and Sam helps him clear out the place. It’s not even midnight, but he’s a little bummed.

She didn’t show up, but whatever.

He changes out of his spiderman costume and into a pair of gym shorts and a t-shirt. Nobody likes spandex, he doesn’t know what the hell Peter Parker was thinking. Plus, the little kids stopped trick or treating hours ago. Definitely not worth it.

He dumps the contents of his garbage can onto the lawn, tossing the remaining fruit into a garbage bag and seriously over watering the grass. Kirsch drops the empty garbage can just inside his garage door and steps inside, hitting the button that closes the garage on his way in.

He kind of wishes she had showed up.

Kirsch drops himself on the couch and plays Halo for a few minutes, but it’s not as fun as it usually is. He throws the controller down and leaves the headset on the couch when he steps over Selina to
get a drink from the kitchen.

He hears something — like a cracking noise, or a splash. And then another. And another. And another. He curses, leaves his drink on the counter, and picks up a baseball bat from the coat closet.

He drops it the second he opens the front door and sees her.

“Danny?”

She’s throwing things at his truck. Something white cracks against the hood and splashes across his not all that impressive paint job.

“Bro, what the fuck?” He hops the row of flowers between his front door and the garage and reaches her before she can throw another egg, and she doesn’t notice him until he’s in her space, keeping her from egging his truck again. “What the hell are you doing, this is my truck.”

She seems to find that hilarious, and she barks out a laugh. “You know, I noticed that. If you haven’t caught on yet, it’s trick or treat.” She waves the last egg around while he tries to grab it. “I picked trick.”

He clenches his jaw. His truck is a mess and now she’s taunting him on top of all this, waving the last egg around while he tries to take it from her. “Bro. Give it, what the hell is wrong with you?”

Something shifts in her eyes, and if it wasn’t so easy to blame on the darkness, he might acknowledge that she looks like she’s crying.

“Well, apparently everything.” The way she says it feels off. There’s something different in her tone. Danny drops her arms to her sides, the egg forgotten.

“Are you drunk?”

“Just a tad.”

He can tell that’s a lie. “Why are you drunk?” She’s not a heavy drinker, and Kirsch is pretty sure the only other time he’s seen her drink is at homecoming. The thought crosses his mind that maybe she has to drink to be whatever they are when they’re alone. But that thought is kind of depressing and totally insulting, so he pushes it away.

“What’s it to you?”

“Uh, you’re throwing things at my truck. I think I’m entitled to a little explanation, this shit is gonna take forever to wash off once it dries.” He doesn’t actually know that for sure, but Danny looks really drunk, so he doesn’t think she’s about to argue biology with him.


Danny throws the last egg, but she misses by a longshot. Danny Lawrence does not miss.

“What’s wrong?” He’d bet money that she won’t tell him, but he has to ask. She’s kind of a bro, and it’s kinda his thing to take care of his bros.

Even the ones he kisses sometimes. Kirsch is pretty sure the bro code still counts if there’s kissing involved. He’ll have to ask Jake.

“I didn’t come here to talk about my feelings. I came here to egg your truck, and now I’m done.”
Kirsch puts his arm out to stop her from walking any further. “Yeah, well you’re out of eggs and you don’t look stable enough to walk home right now. So, talk.”

She looks like a complete wreck when she’s drunk. “I can’t go home right now.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m not sober.” She laughs, but it’s hollow. “Because I’m not straight. Because I’m pissed.”

It takes him a couple seconds to go over the words and double check, but yeah, those definitely make no sense put together. But she’s drunk, and he figures maybe she just needs some sympathy right now.

“I’m sorry?” He tries, and keeps talking, just in case they weren’t the words she was looking for. “Do you want to come inside?”

“Why?” She smiles and there’s a chance the smile is real. “So we can hook up?”

“You’re drunk, I wouldn’t try anything.” He pats her arm, but it’s awkward, and Danny looks uncomfortable. He decides to never try that again. “Come on. I promise you can pretend you were too drunk to know whose house you ended up. I’ve got hot cocoa?”

Danny chews on her lip and then she sighs. “Sorry I egged your truck.”

“It’s okay.” He grins a little, puts his hand on her back and starts to lead her towards the front door. “I TP-ed your house an hour ago.”

“I’ve got hot cocoa.”

—

They kiss eighteen times on the walk home — Carmilla keeps track just for the hell of it. Laura seems enamored with the idea of kissing, and Carmilla is enamored with the idea of Laura, so it all works out nicely, and there’s a lot of kissing.

When they reach her house, they almost forget that somebody else lives there too, because Carmilla is seconds from kissing Laura again when Mark clears his throat.

Laura puts as much distance between them as she can without looking too suspicious. “Hey, Dad.”

He narrows his eyes and puts his hands in his pockets. “Where’s your candy?”

Carmilla looks down and Laura does too. They had left their bags somewhere between Kirsch’s party and the park, but that isn’t easy to explain.

“Oh. We... actually forgot them.”

“How did you forget your candy?”

Funny story, Marcus.

“Isn’t that the whole point of trick or treating?”

Laura gapes and Carmilla wishes she could come up with an excuse for her, anything to calm her down, but there’s something about this interaction that feels different. His questions have a purpose.
He knows something.

Mark takes a few steps towards them. It’s in that moment that she can see the policeman in him, there are certain mannerisms a cop can’t shake, and this is definitely an interrogation.

“What were you doing instead of trick or treating tonight?”

“Dad, we weren’t... we went trick or treating, you can ask LaF and Perry.”

He doesn’t buy it, and Carmilla is sure that she’s more nervous than Laura is. Of all the people she might have expected this from, Laura’s Dad isn’t one of them. He rubs at his eyes and shakes his head. “Don’t lie to me, you know I hate it when people lie, Laura.”

Laura looks guilty and a little scared, and Carmilla has to remind herself that this isn’t a threat, coming from parents like him. That doesn’t stop her from wanting to protect Laura, because it dawns on her that Laura hasn’t even come out to him yet.

“You went to the haunted house didn’t you?”

Carmilla feels the tension pour out of her body in a split second, and she’s impressed by the way Laura eases into a lie. “We might have.”

He shakes his head. “Laura, I’ve told you a million times how dangerous that place is. Nobody knows who runs it, wackjobs get high and break a dozen laws in that haunted house. Girls get hurt, we go through this every year, I don’t want you risking your life for a couple hours of fun just because you want to impress your friends.”

“I talked her into it.” It’s the first time he looks at her since they stepped through the front door.

He sighs. “Did she tell you that she isn’t allowed?”

Laura jumps in, and now it’s just becoming a game of blame tag. “No, I didn’t tell her, it’s my fault.”

“But, she didn’t want to go, I was the one that pushed her.”

“Yeah, but I should have told you that I wasn’t allowed to go.”

“I should have asked if you felt comfortable going.”

She shouldn’t be surprised that they manage to find something to bicker about, even in fake scenarios like this. Mark looks at the two of them and shakes his head. “Alright, I’ve done enough parenting for the night. We’ll worry about this some other time.” He turns to leave and offers them a wave over the back of his head. “Don’t stay up too late.”

“’Night, Dad.” Laura waits until they hear his door shut before she slumps against the front door. “Okay, please tell me I wasn’t the only one who almost had a stroke just now.”

“Definitely not just you.” Carmilla pushes her bangs out of her face to see Laura. She’s less tense now, and there’s a smile on her face that she thinks will probably be stuck there for a long time if she’s feeling even half of what Carmilla is. “But, are you gonna tell him?” As an afterthought, she adds, “It’s okay if you don’t.”

“No, of course I am.” Laura furrows her eyebrows like there’s something on her mind. “Soon, I think. I just...” She drops her voice to a whisper and uses it as an excuse to step closer. Laura’s careful like that, with her actions and her intentions. “I don’t know if right now would be the most
appropriate time to come out. It’s been a long day.” The corners of her lips turn up and Laura looks up at Carmilla. She can see her so much clearer up close, she can count those freckles. She can see how soft her skin always looks. “Also.” Laura reaches for her hand and starts to pull her backwards, leading her up the stairs. “He’d probably make you sleep in the guest bedroom tonight, if he knew. So maybe we can be a little selfish for now.”

She’s alright with that. Carmilla is always selfish with Laura.

She’s surprised that Laura doesn’t bolt up the stairs the way she usually does when she’s excited, because it’s what Carmilla feels like doing, if moving that fast wasn’t so difficult for her, bruises and sore spots considered.

Laura flicks the light on, drapes her jacket over her desk chair, and moves without subtlety to stand in front of her. Carmilla closes the door behind her and falls back against the wood paneling. She reaches a hand back to click the lock on the door. Laura looks blankly at the door handle and takes in a shaky breath. She’s still smiling, and now Carmilla is too, because Laura is in suspenders and a bowtie, and it’s really self-explanatory why she can’t stop looking at her.

“So.” Laura leans forward and takes another step to lessen the distance between them. “What do you want to do? It’s a Friday night.” Laura gestures towards her room as if there was anything in here that could even remotely interest them right now.

“You’re good with your days of the week.”

She makes a poor attempt at an exasperated huff, but it falls short because she still hasn’t stop grinning. “I was trying to be subtle.”

“I’m trying to be deliberate.” Carmilla cups Laura’s face and presses a kiss to her lips. It’s not as rushed or playful as their first few were. She takes her time, holding Laura close and trying to put what she’s feeling into the kiss. Laura reacts immediately, her hands coming up to rest on Carmilla’s arms, tugging Carmilla against her. She pulls back to smile, because kissing and smiling make for very clumsy kisses, and the way Laura looks at her after every time they kiss is probably her new favorite thing about her.

Laura breathes a little heavier than normal. “What was that for?”

“Last night.”

She nods. She knows. Laura presses a kiss to her cheek. “I wanted to kiss you last night.”

She’d thought so, but knowing for sure makes this even better. Carmilla presses their lips together again and Laura makes a soft noise — something between approval and longing.

“Well, you get to kiss me now.”

Laura grins, her tongue poking out between her teeth. “Good. I like kissing.”

She proves this a few more times before their kisses pick up a faster pace and Laura pulls her backwards a few steps. Carmilla holds her close by the straps of her suspenders, and they pull each other back and forth, maneuvering clumsily towards the center of the room. Neither of them are paying attention, and its less than a minute later that they both fall back onto the bed together. Which hurts, her entire side is still sore, and then Laura accidentally presses against her stomach and she can’t help but curse. “Fuck.”

She winces and she doesn’t let herself feel bad about it, because it’s a miracle that she’s not crying.
Laura scrambles back to give her space. “Oh my God, Carm, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay, it’s fine.” She shuts her eyes for a few seconds and the pain numbs itself out. “C’mere.” Carmilla pushes herself further up the bed and tugs at Laura’s suspenders again, nodding towards the spot on the pillows that she really needs Laura to be right now, because if it’s between addressing her baggage and kissing Laura, there’s no competition.

Laura doesn’t look convinced that she’s okay.

“I’m just sore, it’s normal.”

Wrong thing to say. Laura crawls up the bed to prop herself up against the pillows next to Carmilla. “You shouldn’t be sore.”

“And you shouldn’t be talking.” Her hand runs down the length of Laura’s arm, her fingers ending where Laura’s start. They lace their fingers together. “You have a girl in your bed, if you haven’t noticed. A very kissable one.”

That gets a smile out of Laura again, and she leans in slowly, careful not to put any weight on her. She presses a kiss to Carmilla’s neck, and starts to move towards her lips, kissing a trail across her jaw. When Laura hovers over her mouth again, she licks her lips and looks Carmilla in the eyes before melting into another, deeper kiss. Laura sucks on Carmilla’s bottom lip.

She knows one thing for sure. Where Laura lacks experience, she more than makes up for it in enthusiasm.

After another few minutes of exchanging kisses and smiles, Carmilla weaves her hand through Laura’s hair and it’s then that Laura decides to experiment with her tongue, doing something that changes the game fast. Carmilla is too busy trying to replicate it to stop the hum in the back of her throat.

Laura pulls back. “Am I doing okay?”

She actually thinks it’s a joke at first, because Laura couldn’t possibly be asking this question now, but she is, so Carmilla nods.

“I haven’t done this before, so if I’m doing something wrong—”

Carmilla cuts her off with another kiss. She breathes into Laura’s mouth. “You’re doing good.”

“I know, but I’m open to constructive criticism—” She rushes the words, probably because she knows that Carmilla won’t let her finish talking. She’s right. Carmilla captures her bottom lip again and lets herself live out the same fantasy she’s had for over a month. She bites it, tugging for a moment before she strokes her tongue across it. Laura makes an adorable noise the moment she does, and Carmilla decides she wants to hear that noise at least a thousand more times before she dies.

It still doesn’t do the trick. Laura pushes herself up again. “Also, if I do something right, maybe you could tell me so I know what to do?”

Patience is a virtue Carmilla does not possess, especially tonight. “You know, for someone who says they like kissing, you’re doing a lot of not kissing right now.” Despite the fact that the open-mouthed flustered expression on Laura’s face is probably going to be coined the eighth wonder of the world any day now, Carmilla really doesn’t feel like admiring it right now. She really just wants to kiss her to forget the pain that only Laura can kill.
And they have a lot of lost time to make up for. She’s done her fair share of staring this month.

“Right, sorry. Guess I’m nervous.”

“Don’t be.”

Carmilla runs her hand through Laura’s hair again. And then Laura’s enthusiasm is back, and she kisses her hard and fast. It’s not the way Carmilla wants, but she’s not about to start complaining when Laura moves closer to her, still not putting any weight on her. She screws her eyes shut, willing that train of thought away — the one that tells her she can’t even get this part right. Laura is touching her, but she can’t do it the way they want, and it’s the reason that Carmilla surges forward, pushing past the pain to deepen the kiss.

Barely a minute passes of kissing like this before Laura pulls back. *Again.*

“Sorry, sorry, I just.” Laura laughs through her labored breaths. “I have to breathe.”

She’s actually breathless, so Carmilla takes that as a compliment and moves her lips to Laura’s neck, sucking just below her jaw. Laura’s breath catches in her throat and Carmilla makes a mental note to do this more often.

“Oh, that is *not* helping with the breathing thing at all.”

“Sorry.” She’s not. “Maybe we should take a break.”

Laura nods, but she presses another kiss to Carmilla’s lips — a quick one, and then another. “A break. That’s a good idea.”

“Oh.”

Laura sinks into the pillows, and the moment shifts. She hadn’t noticed how tired they both were until now. Laura smiles. “I had a good day.”

“Oh.”

“I told you Halloween wasn’t a stupid holiday.”

Carmilla hums and turns onto her back, evening out the pressure against her bruises. “I never thought it was a stupid holiday.”

“That’s what you told me earlier.”

She’s told her a lot of things that aren’t true. It’s a relief to know there’s one secret she won’t have to keep anymore. “Yeah, well. I lied.”

—

They don’t fall asleep until they lose track of how many times they’ve kissed.
This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.
Let's Make This Night Last Forever

Chapter Summary

HSAU Chapter 19, or the one where Laura needs to girl the hell up.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Drug Mention, Eating Disorder (Implied), Homophobic Slur

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Laura moves her head to the side and is met with a mouth full of hair. She squints her eye open and smiles at the sight of Carmilla sprawled across her. Her smile grows when she remembers the night before.


Kissing on this bed.

(Kissing. Kissing. Kissing.)

Her heart picks up immediately at the thought of more kissing. She smiles to herself and then is hit with a terrible thought: this has happened before. Waking up, thoughts of kissing - kissing Carmilla. Oh God. What if that was another dream? It doesn’t feel like a dream, but now she’s not sure. She glances down at the peaceful look on Carmilla’s face and brushes her bangs to the side.

If this wasn’t a dream, can they still lay like this? Are things different now? Is kissing going to be something that happens all the time?

(The last question is the most pertinent.)

She needs to sort out her thoughts. And she can’t do that with Carmilla clinging to her like her life depends on it.

She tries to slowly shift out from Carmilla when she feels a tight grip around her waist.

“My eyes might be closed, but my body knows it’s before 9AM. Are you trying to wake me on purpose or is there a reason you’re so restless this morning?”

Laura stills, “Um,” Carmilla looks up at her - blinking slowly, hair wild and out of place - and Laura feels a tug in her chest, “Sorry about that.”

Carmilla scoots up so that they’re laying side by side. She grabs Laura’s hand between them and laces their fingers, “Good morning.”

The smile that blooms on her face is enough to get Laura smiling, too, “Morning.” She plays with
their fingers, “You never say good morning on a weekend.”

“I guess I just have a few things to be happy about.”

The way Carmilla is staring at her makes her feel hot all over. She takes in a breath as Carmilla shifts closer. This is definitely kissing distance, but she needs to make sure.

“Um, so, was it Halloween yesterday?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes, reaching up to trace a line up Laura’s arm, nodding.

“Did we stop by Kirsch’s party?”

She shivers as Carmilla’s fingers dance along her collarbone, “Mhm.”

Laura gulps, “And - the park. We went to a park?”

Carmilla glances up at her, licking her lips and nodding as she shifts closer, “Yes.”

“So,” Laura closes her eyes and blows out a breath as Carmilla’s hand drags up her neck to cup her jaw, “So we-”

“Yes.”

Her heart hammers against her chest, “Oh.”

Carmilla’s hand tenses against Laura’s jaw, her eyes flitting across Laura’s face, “Are you regretting it?”

Laura shakes her head so fast she almost knocks Carmilla’s hand off, “No. Not at all.”

“Good,” Carmilla breathes out before leaning forward and pressing the softest kiss to Laura’s lips. “Because I don’t,” Carmilla gives her another slow, lingering kiss, “Not at all.”

(Okay, so - not a dream. Awesome.)

Carmilla pulls back to push some hair behind Laura’s ear but Laura can’t wait. She presses forward and captures Carmilla’s lips, sighing into her mouth as she feels a soft grip against the back of her head. There’s something different about this morning. Everything is slower - more intimate. Carmilla cradles her face like she’s the most delicate thing in the world.

(Shes pours so much into the people she cares about. Laura wishes the world gave Carmilla the same courtesy in return.)

Laura is careful with her hands - last night she learned the dangers of too hard a touch or brushing the wrong spot - and decides that cupping Carmilla’s neck is the safest bet.

Carmilla hums into her mouth, slowing their kisses down until she’s placing soft pecks to Laura’s lips every few seconds.

“You seem to have woken up pretty fast.”

Carmilla doesn’t answer her with words; instead, she traces the edge of Laura’s jaw, moving up to stroke the side of her face - her hands ending up in Laura’s hair. She tries to keep herself steady as Carmilla looks at her like she’s the most important thing in the room.
She’s not used to that feeling and she entertains the thought that Carmilla might have always looked at her like this.

(She’s finally opening her eyes.)

They kiss slowly on and off, Carmilla the one to keep pulling back this time. Sometimes to play with Laura’s hair, sometimes to rub her thumb across Laura’s bottom lip, sometimes to trace patterns into Laura’s skin.

Sometimes she pulls back just to smile.

(That’s Laura’s favourite.)

Carmilla is tracing circles on Laura’s shoulder, so she has more time to stare unabashedly at Carmilla’s face. “You’re so pretty.”

“You’re so real.”

Laura grins, “I would really hope so.”

Carmilla smiles softly and rolls her eyes before looking down, “No, I mean... I’ve wanted this - for a very long time - and now you’re here and it’s actually happening and-” she half shrugs, “I don’t know. It’s just,” she looks up at Laura, “You’re real.”

Laura feels her chest warm, “I am.”

Carmilla rolls her eyes again but shifts forward, running her fingers through Laura’s hair, “Sorry - I’m being you levels of cheesy this morning.”

Laura raises an eyebrow, “Carmilla, you brought me to a park under the stars to have our first kiss. Maybe reconsider who’s the cheesier one here.”

Carmilla blushes and narrows her eyes, bending forward to hide her face in Laura’s neck and playfully nip at her collarbone. She muffles a shut up before Laura lets out a soft laugh, closing her eyes as Carmilla starts to trail soft kisses up her neck. She pours herself into Carmilla’s mouth when she finally gets there, ignoring Carmilla’s laugh at her enthusiasm.

There’s a sound outside her bedroom door and Carmilla leans back but Laura shakes her head and pulls her back in by the shirt, kissing her with more purpose. Carmilla smiles into the kiss and Laura tries not to get dizzy at the feel of Carmilla’s tongue doing some sort of trick she’ll have to ask about later.

(Like, way later. After a lot more kissing.)

Unfortunately, the plan to ignore things goes out the window when there is a harsh knock on the door, “Laura - are you busy?”

Carmilla pulls back and kisses up Laura’s neck, whispering in her ear, “He should define busy.”

Laura flushes and pushes her off, “Uh, just a minute, Dad!”

Carmilla laughs as Laura fusses with her hair, straightening it out as best she can. Carmilla rolls her eyes and sits up, giving Laura a soft kiss before smoothing down some hair behind her ear, “Please relax.”

Laura blows out a breath, “Right. Right,” she turns to the door, “Come in, Dad!”
She clenches at her sheets and tries to plaster on her biggest smile. He walks in and gives a mock salute, “Morning...girls?” He raises an eyebrow in Carmilla’s direction, “You’re up before noon. What’s going on?”

Laura feels like her heart is in her throat but Carmilla presses a calming hand on her thigh underneath the sheets. “I accidentally kept my weekday alarm on. In case you’re wondering: yes, I do hate myself right now.”

He laughs and Laura feels a bit of tension leave her shoulders. Everything is fine. Her dad doesn’t know. Everything is fine.

(Although he is a cop so she’s not completely relieved yet.)

“Well, I’m sorry to hear that, Carmilla. I’m sure you can make up for it by sleeping in until 3pm tomorrow.” He pauses and shoves his hands into his jean pockets, “So I just wanted to pop in and see if you girls wanted to go for a drive? Since you’re both awake maybe we could go out for breakfast after I drop something off at Barb’s.”

Carmilla shrugs, “Not really in the mood to eat right now, Marcus.”

He narrows his eyes and turns his attention to Laura, “Also thought you might want to see Kirsch?”

“Oh, please,” Carmilla scoffs, “You highly overestimate how much I care about that idiot.”

“Carmilla,” Laura turns to her dad, “Please ignore her - but you do know that you don’t need us to supervise you when you visit Barb, right?”

Her dad tenses and crosses his arms, “I don’t need supervision.”

“Dad, you’re a nervous wreck around her. It’s embarrassing.”

“She’s just a friend, Laura.”

Carmilla laughs and it turns into a cough when Laura gently nudges her with her elbow. Laura’s dad looks at her with a raised eyebrow. Carmilla clears her throat, “I think I’m catching something.”

He suddenly looks suspicious and Laura feels panic wash over her again. “Um, we’d love to go. Just give us some time to get ready, okay?”

He nods and smiles, “Sure thing. I’ll be down in the living room.”

He gives Carmilla one last questioning look before walking out and closing the door behind him.

When Laura looks back Carmilla is leaning against the headboard with a scowl and her arms crossed.

“What?”

Carmilla raises her voice an octave, “We’d love to go.” She makes a face of disgust, “Please tell me that was some sort of late Halloween prank.”

“Carm, if we didn’t go he was going to start to get suspicious.”

“So you’re telling me that you’d rather go for breakfast and see Captain Jackass when we could be laying in bed all day kissing.”
(She makes a very valid point.)

“Okay, well, when you present it like that it sounds like a bad idea,” she bites her lip, “But I’m just worried he knows something, you know?”

Carmilla stares at her for a moment before rolling her eyes and dropping back to her side of the bed, “Fine, whatever. Have fun today.”

“What do you mean? You’re obviously gonna come with us.” Laura frowns at the loud laugh Carmilla lets out, “You are!”

“I was serious about not being hungry.”

Laura shrugs, “I’m not hungry either, just lie and say your stomach hurts. I do it all the time.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrow. Laura feels uneasy.

(Doesn’t everyone do that?)

She waves it off, “It’s not a big deal. We’ll obviously eat later.”

Carmilla pauses but sighs, “Well, seeing Kirsch is not on my top list of priorities, either.”

“Carmilla, come on-”

“Cupcake, there is nothing that could make me go.”

Laura sighs before a tiny smile starts to grow. She shifts so that she gently presses herself on top of Carmilla, watching for any sign of pain. Carmilla looks okay so she leans down, hovering over her lips, “Nothing?”

She can feel Carmilla’s chest rise and fall against her, breaths coming in shallow, “Nope.”

She leans in closer, lips a breath apart, “You can’t think of anything at all?” Carmilla’s pupils are blown and she shakes her head slightly. Laura hums before leaning down, biting Carmilla’s lip before giving her a long kiss. She pulls back and Carmilla chases her lips, Laura grinning and moving back farther. She shakes her head, “How about that?”

Carmilla blows out a breath before lunging forward to give Laura a bruising kiss. Laura pulls them back until she’s sitting in Carmilla’s lap. They exchange a few more kisses before Carmilla pulls back, “I’m suddenly a very big fan of breakfast. And your idiot friend.”

Laura laughs and presses forward to give her a quick peck, “That’s great. Now we have about ten minutes to get dressed, so,” she rolls off of her and Carmilla falls back against the pillow with a dramatic sigh.

“You’re the worst person in this world.”

Laura smiles and leans forward to press a lingering kiss to Carmilla’s lips. She pulls back and brushes Carmilla’s bangs from her face, “You sure about that?”

Carmilla grins - the happiest she’s ever seen her - and shakes her head, “Not at all.”

Laura giggles as she bounces off the bed, rummaging through her drawers for something to wear.

(Yeah, definitely not a dream. This is so much better.)
They pull into the driveway and Laura’s dad puts the car in park. “Alright, run inside and drop the tools off so we can get going.”

“Dad, there’s no need to be a grump.”

“I’m not being a grump.”

Laura rolls her eyes, “Ever since you called and she said she wasn’t home you’ve been sulking.” Her dad grips the steering wheel and scoffs. She sighs, “Just go visit her at the hospital or something this week.”

“Laura, that’s not why we’re here.”

Carmilla leans forward from the back seat, “Oh, so is that why you borrowed a bunch of tools as a lame excuse to see her when you probably have a whole set in your garage?”

Laura stifles a giggle at the look on her dad’s face, “No one asked your opinion, kid.”

Carmilla grins and leans back, shrugging her shoulders, “Just saying.”

Laura grabs the bag of tools from the floor and opens the door, “Fine, I’ll be right back. Please behave while I’m gone.”

“I will-”

“I won’t-”

She laughs as she leaves the car, jogging to the front door and ringing the doorbell. No one answers and Laura pulls out her phone; she tried texting Kirsch on the way here but still no answer. His truck is in the driveway, though, so she tries ringing the doorbell again.

She’s in the middle of categorizing her favourite moments of kissing Carmilla when Kirsch opens the door.

“Laura, hey.”

“Kirsch!” She smiles and waves her phone, “I tried texting you like five times.”

His eyes widen slightly and he scratches at the back of his head, “Oh man, sorry. I think I left my phone in my room or something.” He frowns, “Wait, is everything okay?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah - my dad just needed to drop this off to give to your mom, so - here you go.” She reaches forward to pass him the bag and he blocks the entrance as he takes it from her. She quirks an eyebrow, “Since when are you all top-secret-super-spy about letting me in your house?”

His eyes widen and he leans forward, “Dude, what are you talking ab-”

“Do you have anything else to eat or do I have to put up with these weird breakfast bars? You know these things are full of polysyllabic chemicals, right?”

Laura leans to the side to look around Kirsch, her eyebrows shooting up at the sight of Danny walking out of the kitchen in a pair of boxers and one of Kirsch’s workout shirts.

Laura looks back at Kirsch, “Um-”
“Laura, it’s totally not what it looks like.”

“Who’s at the door?” Danny’s face drops when she sees Laura and she rushes forward, “Laura, it’s not what it looks like.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“Listen, she showed up here-”

“I was completely drunk-”

“Yeah! And like, it’s not like I’m gonna throw her to the curb-”

“You almost did-”

“Dude, you were egging my truck and I thought you were some asshole freshman who-”

“I distinctly remember you still calling me an asshole-”

“Oh, right. You sure about that? I don’t know how you remembered anything since you were so hammered-”

“Um, guys?” Laura looks between them, “I’m still here.”

Danny’s face pinks, “Sorry. I, um, kinda had a bad night and ended up in this neighbourhood. Couldn’t really show up at home wasted so,” she shrugs, “I crashed here.” She straightens up, “It’s not a big deal.”

(They hate each other. It’s totally a big deal.)

Laura smiles, “I never said it was.”

Kirsch and Danny share a sigh of relief and it makes Laura smile wider. This is the absolute best thing to ever happen. First she gets together with Carmilla and now two of her good friends could get together, too. Well, that is, if her and Carmilla are together. They have done a lot of kissing - Laura smiles at the thought - and implied that they had feelings for each other. But that’s an implication - not a confirmation.

“Laura?”

“Huh?”

Kirsch frowns, “I asked if you needed a ride home.”

“Oh,” she shakes her head. “No, my dad actually brought me. He’s taking Carmilla and I out for breakfast after.”

Danny’s face lights up, “Breakfast? That doesn’t sound half bad right now. Mind if I leave this hell hole to tag along?”

(Laura doesn’t miss the disappointed look on Kirsch’s face.)

“Uh, yeah, I do.”

Danny makes a face, “Yes you mind or yes you don’t care?”
“Yes, I mind.” Danny frowns and Laura waves it off, “I mean - well, I haven’t asked my dad and we might end up having to go on a bunch of errands after and that just won’t be fun for you! So it’s probably best if you just stay here.”

Danny hesitates before glancing at Kirsch, “I guess it might be better to avoid going home for a little bit more.”

Kirsch nods, “Totally, you can stay as long as you want.”

(Laura can hear wedding bells in the air.)

“Perfect! I should probably get going though. Carmilla is probably sulking from waiting for so long - you know how she gets.”

Danny rolls her eyes and Kirsch looks lost, “Uh, sure.”

“Bye, Laura.”

“See you later!” She spins and rushes back to the car. She can’t wait to tell Carmilla.

(She’s too excited to remember that Carmilla won’t care.)

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“When I said that I was prolonging going home, I didn’t really mean doing something like this.” She rolls her eyes as she can hear an annoying laugh from behind her, “You’re honestly such an asshole.”

“Hey, this is just fair. You did promise to clean this up last night.”

Danny dips the sponge into the soap bucket and slams it against the truck door, “I was drunk last night. I probably said a lot of shit I didn’t mean.”

“You got that right.”

She stills her hand and can feel her throat tighten. She tries to relax her shoulders and ease back into scrubbing the side of the truck, refusing to look at him when she asks: “Why? What did I say?”

“Oh, I can’t remember the specifics.”

Danny grips the sponge and contemplates what good will come out of pelting it at Kirsch’s head. “I call bullshit. I didn’t say anything.”

Kirsch is suddenly by her side, leaning against the truck and grinning, “You talked a lot about how great of a kisser I am.”

Danny laughs and scrubs at a particularly stubborn yolk splatter, “Okay, now I know you’re bullshitting me.”

He frowns and crosses his arms, “Dude, I’m a wicked kisser. You know this.”

Danny smiles to herself and shrugs, “I don’t know. Maybe I’m reconsidering my previous opinion.”

She gasps as she feels a strong hand on her hip, turning her around so her back is against the side of the truck. Kirsch presses himself against her and her breath is shallow, “What are you doing?”
He leans forward and she can’t stop herself from dropping the sponge and gripping the front of his shirt when she feels his lips against hers. She tries not to smile into the kiss - but he tastes like sugar and coffee and she doesn’t entirely hate it.

(It's the best kind of bittersweet.)

He pulls back, “Still reconsidering?”

“Fuck you.”

“That sounds like an invitation.”

She scoffs and nervously darts her eyes around the street. Kirsch frowns, “Dude, there’s no one around to catch us. No one lives near me.”

“I know that.”

“Besides, I have a reputation, too, you know.”

She bites the inside of her cheek, “Sure you do.”

He scowls, "Come on: head of the Zetas hooking up with the top Summer Soc chick? It’s like, against ten different rules probably." He pauses and she's hyper aware of how close they still are. If she kisses him again maybe it will shut him up.

"We’re kind of like Romeo and Juliet, actually.”

(So much for that.)

“You know that they died like days after they had sex, right?”

"That's two sex references in a few minutes." He grins, "Are you trying to tell me something, Lawrence?"

"You're disgusting."

He smiles at her and she can privately admit to herself that it’s cute.

(This makes her want to rip out her hair.)

He rolls his eyes, "Anyway, all I know is that they were from rival families. So we're like the modern-day Cappelletti and Montagues.”

“God, it’s Capulet.”

“Whatever. Same difference.”

Danny stares at him blankly, "I can't believe I allow you to put your tongue in my mouth."

He grins and sticks his tongue out, darting forward to try and lick her face. She laughs and shifts away from his advances, swatting at him, "Why do you have to be so gross?"

He shrugs, “I’m a funny guy.”

She holds her hands against his cheeks and continues to laugh as he moves his head around to try and get her face.
“You’re an overgrown toddler.”

“I know what you are but what am I?”

“Oh my God—”

A loud laugh bursts from her throat and Kirsch takes the opportunity to grab her hands and pin them back against the truck. He’s closer now, and as he leans forward she licks her lips.

(She can almost taste him.)

He’s almost at her lips and she takes in a short breath. This is good. Kissing will stop this conversation and help her forget all the things she could have said last night.

“Why don’t you want to go home?”

(Nevermind.)

“It’s none of your business.”

He rolls his eyes, “You showed up at my house drunk and upset.” He loosens his hold on her wrists and avoids her eyes, “It can be my business if you want it to be.”

"My parents are just being assholes again."

(That’s an understatement.)

He looks like he wants to say something kind or empathetic or supportive. She doesn’t need that right now.

(Or maybe she does.)

She pushes forward and turns them so that he’s pushed against the truck. She clasps her hands behind the back of his neck, "But I think I'm done talking now."

He’s eager to match the force of her kiss and she's glad teenage boys can be counted on for something. She clenches her eyes shut and let’s Kirsch distract her from thoughts of the last night. He’s surprisingly good at that, his tongue and hands finding ways to help her shut out the rest of the world when her mind is going a mile a minute.

(It’s becoming a strange sort of comfort.)

But he's just a distraction. A means to an end. Complication-free.

She digs her nails into his scalp as he palms her over her bra and she's vaguely aware that they're still out in public in the middle of the afternoon. If only her parents could see her now; they would be so proud.

(Shewishes that was sarcasm.)

She pushes gently on his chest, "Maybe we shouldn't get to second base in the middle of your driveway."

"Does that mean you want to round the bases inside?"

The fact that her first instinct is to laugh instead of want to punch him in the face is concerning. He
looks entirely too smug for her liking, though.

“You know, on second thought maybe I am feeling a little adventurous.”

He pauses and she tries not to grin at the hopeful look on his face, “Oh yeah?”

“Mhm,” she nods and grabs at her shirt, “Changing back into my clothes from last night has made me feel kind of gross. How about a shower?”

His face lights up, “Yeah, a shower sounds real nice right now.” He holds her hips, “And like, you know, we could share one to conserve water. Us Zetas are big on saving the planet.”

She hums as she bites her lip, “I bet you are.” He looks like he’s won the lottery and she uses all of her willpower not to laugh. She gestures to the house, “After you.”

He practically skips away from her and the moment he turns around she reaches down and grabs the bucket, lunging forward and dumping the water over the top of his head.

“Danny!”

She drops the bucket and holds her sides, finally letting that pent in laughter out, “Sorry, bro. Since you’re so big on the environment I figured you might not want to waste this water.”

He looks like he’s honestly considering fighting her and it spurs on more laughter. He tries to twist the water out of his shirt and it’s not working so he opts to remove it entirely.

Well, a topless Kirsch is definitely not something she expected in this plan.

“See something you like?”

Her face is warm and she scowls at the smug look on his face. “You need a tan.”

He rolls his eyes, “Whatever.” He pauses, “Listen, if you really did want to take a shower you’re welcome to go for it. I can finish up the truck.” He squeezes out the water from his shirt, “You know, if you’re still looking to stall going home.”

The reminder settles a heavy weight in the pit of her stomach. She nods, “Um, thanks.”

He shrugs and walks forward to grab the sponge, wiping away at the stains on the windshield.

She’s a few steps away when he calls out to her, "Danny."

His tone is cautious and it makes her chest feel heavy. She turns, "Yeah?"

“I’m really sorry about your parents.”

Her stomach turns, “It’s not your fault.”

His face is unreadable and he gives her a small nod. She offers him a smile and quickly turns to jog to the front door.

(At the end of the day, he might not be the worse person in the world to make out with.)

-----

“Okay, Jake texted me - he and Sam can’t make it today - so I think we can get started.”
LaFontaine slips their hand into Perry’s and squeezes tight. She feels warm and it settles a calm over them.

Danny looks around, “Just the four of us?”

They shrug, “I guess so.”

Perry does not look discouraged in the slightest. She sits up, “So, before we get into our topics of the week let’s start off with our weekends! It was Halloween, so that’s very exciting.”

LaFontaine looks around and tries not to laugh at everyone’s lack of excitement.

Perry pushes on, “Does anyone have any fun stories from the weekend?”

The group is silent and LaFontaine notices Laura fidgeting in her seat. “Laura? Why don’t you start.”

Laura startles and plays with her fingers, letting out a soft, nervous laugh, “Me? I’m sure someone else is dying to start.”

LaFontaine laughs, “Yeah, I doubt that.”

They frown as Laura fidgets some more before painting on a smile. Laura usually loves to start these things.

“Well, okay! So, Halloween was on the weekend - as you all know. And that was really great. You know, lots of great stuff all around in that regard. I mean - Halloween! What’s not to love?”

(This is becoming a trainwreck and LaFontaine just isn’t sure why yet.)

Perry gives them a nervous look before turning back to Laura with a smile, “That’s great, Laura. Anything in particular you’d like to share?”

Laura pales, “What?”

“Oh!” Laura laughs nervously and from a quick survey of the faces around the room LaFontaine feels pretty confident that they all feel just as awkward as them. “Yeah, well, I spent most of it with Carm just...hanging out.” Laura finally folds her hands in front of herself to stop them from moving and takes a deep breath, “Also - funny story: Taylor Swift’s new album just came out and so did I.”

(And there it is.)

Their eyebrows shoot up and Perry opens and closes her mouth a few times but nothing comes out. The room is silent and Laura looks like she’s going to cry. LaFontaine clears their throat, “That’s great, Laura. Um, to both of those things.”

She doesn’t look convinced. “I can’t really speak on Taylor’s behalf, but thanks.”

A heavy pit in their chest nags at them. Months ago Laura would have told them this first. Now, with everything they’re doing they’ve hardly had time to be there for her. They sit up and offer Laura their best reassuring face, “Honestly, obviously no judgement here.”

She looks a bit more relaxed and the rest of the group nods along. Danny puts her hand over Laura’s, “That’s cool, Laura. I’m really happy for you.”
“Me too,” Perry smiles wide and squeezes LaFontaine’s hand, “We’re all very proud of you.”

The usual light around Laura’s face is finally returning as she beams at them, “Really? That’s awesome.” She blows out a huge breath and sinks a little in her seat, “That feels a lot better. This has been eating away at me the whole week.”

Oh. A week. LaFontaine swallows the bitter taste in their mouth; it feels like a slap in the face, but they can’t really blame her. It’s not like they’ve been that available lately.

(Doesn’t really make it a problem yet, though.)

They try to keep a supportive face, “The whole week?”

Laura looks around nervously, “Um, yeah. I had been wondering it for a while and then after homecoming I realized I liked...” she pauses, “someone-”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Danny rolls her eyes, “You can just say Carmilla, Laura.”

Perry glares, “Danny.”

“What?” Danny turns to Laura, “Come on, Laura. It’s painfully obvious that you’re both into each other.”

The automatic smile that lights Laura’s face helps to calm LaFontaine down. She deserves to be happy. Laura tucks some hair behind her ear, her voice a bit softer, “Okay - yeah, it’s Carmilla.”

It sounds like a prayer, like she’s in reverence of the very idea of her. They glance at Perry quickly. (They understand that feeling all too well.)

Perry claps, “Oh, this is so great. You’re both obviously made for each other.” LaFontaine chokes back a laugh as Perry kicks their shin under the table. (They’ve heard Perry’s opinions on Carmilla.)

“Thanks, Perry.”

“So,” Danny looks at Laura expectantly and Laura turns to them for answers before turning back to Danny.

“What?”

“Are you dating or not?”

“Um,” Laura sits up in her seat, “I don’t think so.”

Perry laughs, “Well that’s silly, how could you not know?”

“I mean, we’ve been making out. Like - a lot. Practically the whole weekend, actually.”

LaFontaine grins, “Nice, Frosh.”

Perry’s smile widens, “So you are dating then.”

“Um, just because you kiss someone doesn’t mean you’re dating them.” They all look to Danny and she looks a bit uncomfortable under their stares, “I mean, it’s a bit limiting in terms of sexual
expression to assume that you can only hook up with someone you’re dating. Lots of people are perfectly happy to kiss someone with zero feelings and no commitment. Just an agreement between two consenting individuals to leave things with no strings attached."

Laura looks panicked at the idea of this, “Oh God, you’re right.”

“Wait, wait - Laura, come on.” They lean forward in their seat after shooting Danny a disapproving look, “Danny’s right, but that doesn’t mean that’s what’s going on with you and Carmilla.”

Laura shakes her head, “We just started kissing and... never stopped. We never talked about what we are.”

“Sweetie, it’s okay.” Perry glares at Danny and she responds with an eye roll.

“Yeah, sorry, Laura. I’m not saying that’s what’s going on with you and Carmilla. I just meant in general, you know.”

Laura turns to her, “That’s fine. This was stupid to bring up, you’re right.”

Danny sighs, “I’m not right about you. You just gotta get the courage to ask her out.”

“I am not asking her out.”

Danny crosses her arms, “Never thought you’d be one to be a coward, Hollis.”

The room is blanketed with tension. They raise their eyebrows at the quiet transformation of uncertainty to disbelief to rage on Laura’s face.

“I am not a coward.”

Danny shrugs, “Prove it, then. Ask her out.”

Laura silently shakes with anger before leaning forward, “Okay, you know what? Maybe we should stop talking about me. Let’s talk about you.”

Danny balks, “Uh, I have nothing to talk about.”

“How was your weekend with Kirsch?”

Okay, they didn’t exact that.

(Or, maybe they kind of did. In hindsight.)

“I didn’t have a weekend with Kirsch.”

“But you spent the night at his place.”

Danny’s face goes red, “Laura.” She turns to LaFontaine and Perry, “I didn’t sleep with him.”

Laura smiles, “So you keep saying.”

“Laura, I didn’t.” Danny looks absolutely horrified as she turns to them, “Don’t believe her.”

“Or maybe we should talk about you walking around Kirsch’s place in his boxers.”

(Holy shit, this is better than watching reality TV.)
Danny shakes her head, “No, maybe we should really get back to talking about your almost girlfriend.”

Perry squeezes their hand tight, “Okay, girls - I don’t think there’s any need to-”

"She’s not my almost girlfriend."

"Well, she would be your actual girlfriend if you did something about it."

"You’re one to talk."

Danny raises her eyebrows, "And what the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

Perry is gripping their hand like her life depends on it, "I think we all-"

"It means if you want Kirsch so bad maybe you should stop being such a coward."

Danny’s laughter cuts through the room with a harsh bite, "You’re delusional."

"I'm not. Just because you can't see it-"

"Laura, if anyone in the group is the oblivious one, it isn't me."

Laura looks like she's seeing red, "You know, why don't we just skip right ahead and talk about why you were so drunk and ended up at Kirsch’s house in the first place."

Danny’s jaw locks, "Laura."

"No. You call me oblivious, but you’re the one who needed liquid courage to make a move."

"That's not why-"

"Oh really? Then why did you?"

“I don’t know, Laura. Maybe it’s because I’m sick of my parents hating me for not being straight.”

Laura freezes and the air gets caught in the back of LaFontaine’s throat as they watch both Danny and Laura crumble in front of them.

“Oh God, Danny – I’m so, so sorry.”

Danny shakes her head, “It’s fine.” She runs her hand through her hair, “I didn’t mean to explode on you like that. Or to call you oblivious.”

Laura looks at them nervously and they shrug. She looks back at Danny, “Uh, it’s okay. Don’t worry about it.”

Perry hesitantly glances between the group, “Do you want to talk about it?”

Danny’s jaw tenses, “Not particularly.”

“Danny,” LaFontaine’s shoulders slump, “Come on.”

She opens her mouth to say something and Laura reaches over and covers Danny’s hand with her own, offering her a reassuring smile. Danny blows out a deep breath, “A bunch of us Summer Soc girls decided to dress up as each other for Halloween. We drew names from a hat and I got Tanya – and not to be stereotypical but you know she makes Ellen Page look like the straightest person on
this planet. My parents took one look at what I was wearing before I left the house and it’s just,” she sighs, “You can only hear the word *dyke* so much before it gets tiring.”

They think of their parents and feel their chest tighten. They understand too well. “I’m really sorry.”

“Honestly, it’s fine.” Danny gently removes her hand from Laura’s hold and reaches down to grab her bag. “I think I’m going to cut out early of today’s meeting if you all don’t mind.”

The broken look on her face makes their blood boil. They clench their fist and nod, “Yeah, of course.”

“Danny, I really don’t think-”

They squeeze Perry’s hand, “Let her go, Perr.”

Danny gives them a look of appreciation and is out the door the next second. Laura watches her leave and turns back to them with a hopeless expression. “I’m a horrible person.”

“You’re not a horrible person. You’re human.”

Laura shrugs, “I guess.”

“Listen - Danny was right though,” Laura’s face tenses and they shake their head, “No, I mean that if you want Carmilla to be your girlfriend then you should just ask her.”

Laura flushes, “I don’t think I can.”

“You totally can. You’re a badass, Hollis. Isn’t she, Perr?”

Perry smiles and nods, “Yes. A total... badass.”

Laura and LaFontaine share a look before laughing, “Way to be convincing, Perr.”

“You know I meant well, Laura.”

LaFontaine claps their hands, “So! This meeting was obviously a fucking disaster. Let’s just call it a day.”

“LaFontaine, we haven’t even covered-”

“Perr, look around. It’s just the three of us. If you really wanna talk about gay shit, we can go take this to the diner or something.” Their face lights up, “Actually, I could *really* go for some fries right now.”

That seems to satisfy her, “Okay, that’s actually a great idea.”

“Um,” Laura packs up her bag, “I already ate before the meeting so you can go on without me.”

“Come on, Laura. It’s not going to kill you to eat again. Let’s go.”

She tries to protest but LaF is on their feet and throwing an arm around her shoulder, “It’ll be my treat. You can talk about how gay you are for Karnstein.”

Laura gives them a nervous laugh, “I guess. Sure.”

They smile to themselves; they still have time to be there for her.
(They hope there are still things left that they haven’t completely fucked up.)

-----

“I like you.”

Carmilla kisses down Laura’s neck, “I like you, too.”

Laura tries to focus. She knows she had a point to this and is vaguely aware that the new Faking It episode is playing in the background - coincidentally Reagan and Amy are also making out - but it’s hard to concentrate when Carmilla sucks on this precise spot at the base of her neck.

She blows out a shaky breath, “No, I mean: I like you.”

She can feel Carmilla smile against her skin. Carmilla leans back and Laura looks down at her as she shifts in Carmilla’s lap.

“We’ve already gone over this for the past four days.”

Laura feels her cheeks flush more than they already are, “I know, but - I just wanted to check in. See if we’re still there.”

Carmilla smiles up at her and nods, “Okay.” She cups her hand behind Laura’s neck and pulls her closer for another kiss. It takes Laura a few seconds to realize something, “Wait.”

Carmilla groans and pulls back, “Laura, come on.”

“Carm, this is important.”

Carmilla suddenly straightens up, “What is it?”

“Well,” Laura plays with the collar of Carmilla’s shirt, “You didn’t say it back.”

“Yes, I did.”

“No. You just said you like me. Not that, you know,” she trails off and shrugs. Carmilla looks up at her with a blank expression. Laura sighs and rolls her eyes, “That you like me, too.”

Carmilla’s chest starts to silently shake and Laura pouts, “I’m being serious!”

“Laura,” Carmilla reaches up and cups her cheeks, “I like, like, like, like, like you. Satisfied?”

Laura’s chest expands; it’s more full than she could have ever imagined. “Yes. And just so you know: I like, like, like-”

“Jesus Christ-” Carmilla leans up and muffles Laura’s words with a kiss. Laura laughs into Carmilla’s mouth, reminding herself for the hundredth time that this is actually real.

She thinks of LaFontaine’s words of advice from yesterday and wonders if she should ask. They’re already on the subject - all she has to do is say the actual words.

“Carm?”

Carmilla pulls back and reaches up to move some hair out of Laura’s face, “I can only say the word like so many times in an hour.”
Laura tries to smile but Carmilla must read something on her face, “Hey, what’s up?”

The million reasons that this could ruin things suddenly pop into her mind and she shakes her head, “Nevermind.”

Before Carmilla can question it Laura leans down to kiss her again.

(Shes can save this for another day.)

-----

“Have you seen the silver ornaments?” Perry rummages through the box in front of her and frowns, "LaFontaine?"

“Hey, babe - check me out.”

Perry turns around and laughs at the sight of them. LaFontaine has wrapped a string of lights around themselves and is grinning wide.

"Babe-"

"Wait, wait - here," they bend down and plug them in, a blur of multi-coloured lights as they gesture to themselves, "Get it?"

"No, sweetie."

They sigh and shuffle to the table to grab the Christmas star, holding it above their head,

"I'm LaFon-tree."

She bursts out laughing and steps forward, grabbing their cheeks and giving them a long kiss. She giggles into their mouth and shakes her head against their lips, "Every time I think you're the biggest dork you somehow outdo yourself."

They frown, "Hey, that was an A+ pun. Give credit where credit's due."

Perry pulls back and adjusts some of the lights around their collar, “You’re going to end up choking yourself to death.”

“If I do please keep these lights on my body and engrave LaFon-tree on my tombstone.”

She laughs and shoves their shoulder before giving them another quick peck. She looks at the box at their feet, “Did you see any of the silver ornaments in there?”

They shrug, “I just went for the lights and kind of lost track of everything else after that to be honest.”

Perry frowns, “LaFontaine.”

“What?”

“I don’t want to decorate everything by myself.”

“Babe, it’s the 5th of November. If we’re going to decorate for Christmas almost two months in advance let’s at least have some fun with this.”
“We are having fun.” LaFontaine raises their eyebrows, “Okay, okay - you can continue to be,” she sighs and rolls her eyes, “LaF-on-tree.”

They grin wide, “You’re the best, babe.”

They spend the next forty minutes listening to Christmas music and eating way too many sugar cookies. It takes LaFontaine tripping over themselves for the third time for Perry to suggest that maybe they only keep the lights wrapped around their shoulders.

(LaFontaine sulks for a good ten minutes after removing their leg lights since it ruined the complete Christmas tree aesthetic.)

LaFontaine opens a new box of decorations while Perry checks her phone. She tried texting Danny a few hours ago but still no response. Ever since the GSA meeting she’s been worried about her and she didn’t get a chance to talk to her that much in the past few days.

She sighs as she tucks her phone back into her pocket. “I can’t believe Danny’s parents.”

“I can.”

She frowns. Their entire demeanor has shifted to something more somber. “I know, I obviously can, too. Just - still. I feel bad.”

“Well, whatever. It is what it is.”

She looks up at them and they're untangling a new set of lights, a blank expression on their face. Something is different about them lately and she’s starting to notice it in the little things. She can feel a tiny ball of worry burrowing itself into the pit of her stomach, slowly gnawing away at her insides. Something just doesn’t feel right.

“Sweetie, is everything okay?”

LaFontaine slows their sorting of ornaments, “Of course.”

The feeling continues to nag away at her. “Are you sure?”

They look up at her. She can’t figure out their expression. “Yeah, babe. I’m fine.”

“LaF,” she toys with her bracelet, “Something seems wrong.”

They scoff and move to start putting some ornaments on the tree, “Seriously, I’m okay, Perr.”

She walks over and reaches up to still the hand that is holding an ornament to a branch, “LaFontaine.”

They shrug out of her touch and the gesture stings. They hang the ornament and turn to her, “Are you going to drop this?”

She crosses her arms, “Is there something for me to drop?”

They reach up and run a hand through their hair, “I’ve just been feeling kind of out of it lately.”

“What - like sick?”

They shrug, “Yeah, I think so. I don’t know.” They hang another ornament. “I’m probably just stressed out or something - you know how I get. But I’ve been avoiding going to the doctor because
you know I hate seeing them.” They pause and avoid her stare, “Especially after last year.”

Flashes of the worst night of her life pass through her mind and she feels a chill go down her back. She reaches up and cups their cheek, gently directing them to look at her, “This isn’t the same thing.”

They let out a soft laugh. It sounds empty. “Yeah. It’s not.”

“Promise me you’ll make an appointment to go to the doctor soon to get checked out.”

“Perr-”

“Baby, please.”

Their eyes flit across her face and she can feel a lump in the back of her throat. She hates when they try to put the world on their shoulders.

(They don’t want a repeat of last year.)

They nod, “Okay, fine. I’ll make an appointment.”

“And if you want company I can go with you.”

They roll their eyes, “Sure.”

“Honestly, LaFontaine.” She brings her other hand up to cup both of their cheeks, “You mean the world to me, and if you’re going through something again you can just tell me, okay? You don’t have to carry all of your burdens on your own.”

Something crumbles in their face and they blow out a shaky breath before leaning forward to kiss her. They lean back and lick their lips, “Um, there is something else I think we should talk about.”

She nods quickly, “Of course.”

They blow out another breath, “Okay.”

They both startle at the sound of the front door slamming.

“Perry! Is LaFontaine over?”

She can feel her mood immediately drop and she tries to put on a brave face. She turns towards the entrance, “In here, Dad!”

LaFontaine scrambles to unravel the lights and Perry pities them, reaching over to help them shrug out of the tangle of wires. She knows how uncomfortable they are in front of her dad.

(He’s not the nicest guy. She doesn’t blame them.)

He walks into the living room and sighs, “What’s going on in here?”

Perry moves the bundle of lights to the table and blows a breath out of her nose, “Dad, it’s early November. I always decorate your place around this time since you don’t care to do it yourself. I don’t know why you’re always surprised.”

He huffs and turns to LaFontaine, “Do you mind moving your car to the street so I can get mine in the garage?”
“Yeah, of course. Sorry, if I knew you were going to be home this early I wouldn’t have blocked the driveway.”

Her dad doesn’t dignify LaFontaine with a response, turning around and walking back out of the room.

They sigh, “I should probably just head home. I know he hates me.”

“He doesn’t hate you.” They roll their eyes and Perry sighs, “You know he’s like that with everyone. Even me.”

It comes out sadder than she intends because LaFontaine’s face softens and they reach forward to squeeze her hand. “Your dad doesn’t hate you.”

Well, he certainly doesn’t care about her. “I know. It was a poorly chosen joke.”

Their eyes dart to the entranceway before they lean forward and give her a quick kiss. “I can call you when I get home, okay?”

She wants to ask them to stay. She wants to ask them to take her with them. She wants this unsettling feeling to go away and she wants to stop stressing about things that aren’t going to matter until a couple of years from now.

(Just because she wants something doesn’t mean she’s going to get it.)

But it’s probably best for them to go, especially with her dad being home and his inevitable rant about the future of their family.

(Family. The word falls off her tongue like a punchline; they haven’t been one for years.)

Perry nods, “Okay. Thanks, honey.”

They grab their phone from the table and are about to walk off when Perry catches them by the wrist, “Wait.”

They turn back and furrow their brow, “What’s wrong?”

“You never got to finish what you were saying.”

They give her a half smile and a shrug, “It’s fine. I know you’re going to have your hands full with your dad anyway. It was just something stupid about school.”

(Something still doesn’t seem right.)

She squeezes their wrist, “We can talk about it later on the phone, okay?”

They just nod and blow her a kiss before leaving the room.

Perry sits in an armchair and sighs. She’s not looking forward to the rest of the night with her dad. It will be an auto-pilot bickering of money, school, expectations.

She’ll just have to try to distract herself with finishing up the decorations. Which is a fairly good plan since she knows he’ll never help with them - he hates the holiday and celebrating it. If they were a normal family she would be more disappointed.

(But really: what’s the point of celebrating if she’s not with the people who actually love her?)
LaF (8:01pm): have you asked her yet?
Laura (8:04pm): She’s not over right now.
LaF (8:05pm): so that’s a giant NO then
Laura (8:06pm): I don’t want to have that kind of conversation over the phone!!
LaF (8:08pm): right. and what was your excuse yesterday?
LaF (8:09pm): “I can’t ask her tonight because we have to watch faking it”
Laura (8:10pm): It was a good episode.
LaF (8:11pm): It’s only 20 minutes. Why didn’t you ask her afterwards?
Laura (8:16pm): ...we were too busy making out
Laura (8:17pm): but the timing just didn’t feel right
LaF (8:18pm): Laura...come on, you can do this
Laura (8:19pm): you know what? you’re right. it’s time I girled the hell up and just went for it
LaF (8:20pm): there you go! go get her, frosh
Laura (8:21pm): !!!!! thanks laf <3

Six days. It has been six days since their first kiss and still nothing. No talk about dating. No talk about labels. No talk about anything. And despite what she told LaFontaine yesterday, it has been almost twenty-four hours and she still hasn’t said anything.

Because apparently all they do is kiss now. Which is completely fine with Laura - she does get to kiss Carmilla, after all. But it would be nice to know where she stands - where they stand.

But no. Six days later and she knows nothing.

(November 6th: the start of Laura’s slow descent into madness.)

“I think I’m going to go grab a drink from downstairs - I think your dad mentioned stocking up on Dr. Pepper. Do you want something?”

“Okay, that’s it! We are talking about this now.”

“About Dr. Pepper?” Carmilla shrugs, “Kind of random even for you, but sure.”

Laura scowls, “Not about Dr. Pepper,” she scoffs, “God.”

“Oh...okay.” Carmilla looks at her for a moment, “So what are we talking about that is so urgent?”

Laura lets out a hollow laugh, “‘So urgent’. Don’t mock the seriousness of this, Carmilla.”

Carmilla sighs and moves to sit on the end of the bed, “Okay, are you going to tell me what the fuck
is going on or am I going to have to watch you flip your shit for the next ten minutes.”

Laura sneers, “Oh, I’m sorry - I forgot not everyone is as stoic and apathetic as you.”

She gulps as Carmilla gets to her feet and moves to stand in front of her, “What the fuck is wrong with you right now?”

“I’m worth something, Carmilla.”

Carmilla scrunches her face in confusion, “No one said you weren’t.”

“Then start treating me that way!”

“And what the hell implies that I don’t?”

“I don’t know. Maybe you should look at your behaviour this past week.”

Carmilla looks at her with a blank expression. “Um, pretty sure my behaviour this week has been pretty giving if you ask me.”

“Yeah, only if you get something in return.”

Laura’s stomach twists as the room envelopes them in silence. A cold look flashes in Carmilla’s eyes, “Are you trying to imply that I don’t care about you?”

“No,” Laura crosses her arms, “I’m saying that you don’t care about me.”

Carmilla throws her hands up, “Holy shit, you’re such a child!”

“I am not.”

“Laura, if I didn’t care about you then why would I be dating you?”

“I don’t know, Carmilla - you tell me!” The blood rushes to her cheeks and she pauses, “Wait. What do you mean?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes and huffs, “I mean exactly what I said. You’re a smart girl, Laura. It’s not that hard to figure out.”

“No, no,” Laura shakes her head, “You said we were dating.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows, “Yeah. Because we are?”

“No we aren’t!”

“I’m pretty sure I would know if we weren’t.”

“Okay, no,” Laura closes her eyes and blows out a deep breath, “I’ve spent this whole week trying to ask you out.”

“Oh my God,” Carmilla rubs her hand down her face, “Is this why you’re being such an asshole right now?”

“Hey,” Laura pouts, “I’m not being an asshole.”

“Everything you just said in the past few minutes is deemed asshole-worthy.”
“No it isn’t!”

“Oh no, Carmilla doesn’t care about me. Oh no, Carmilla’s mean.” Carmilla levels her with a look, “Am I close?”

Laura hugs her arms closer to her chest, “I didn’t say that exactly.”

“Yeah, well - you might as well have.” Carmilla steps back and clenches her jaw, “Since we cleared that up and you managed to thoroughly insult me, can I go get us drinks now?”

The back of Laura’s neck heats up and she awkwardly nods, “Uh, yeah.”

Carmilla is out of the room and Laura plops down face-first onto her bed. She is such a fool. This whole week she was a giant ball of stress for absolutely no reason. She feels completely ridiculous and wonders if it’s possible to just bury her face into this bed forever.

(She has a pretty good shot at dying of embarrassment, so that might be another option.)

She can hear Carmilla enter the room again and she flips over and sits up, “Listen, about what I just said-”

Carmilla is at the end of the bed and pulling her up by the hand in one quick motion, cupping her cheeks and giving her a long kiss. Laura is dizzy because suddenly there is a tongue in her mouth and hands in her hair and Carmilla is doing that really great thing when she sucks on her bottom lip.

(Just - wow.)

Carmilla pulls back and rests her forehead against Laura’s, “Be my girlfriend.”

Laura tries to catch her breath, “I thought you said we were already dating.”

“Well, that obviously wasn’t clear enough. So, officially - do you want to be my girlfriend or not?”

“I don’t know, I’m not sure if I want to settle down with one person quite yet-”

“Laura.” Carmilla presses forward and they both smile into the kiss before she pulls back. “You’re not allowed to be a smartass right now.”

“Yes.”

“No, you’re not-”

Laura shakes her head, “No, I mean - yes, I’ll be your girlfriend.”

“Oh,” Carmilla bites her lip and her attempt to hide a grin is failing, “Good.”

Laughter bubbles up in the back of Laura’s throat and she gives Carmilla a few more kisses, “I have a girlfriend.”

“You do.”

“I am dating Carmilla Karnstein.”

Carmilla laughs, “You are. My condolences.”

She frowns and wraps her arms around Carmilla’s waist, “Carm.”
“Fine, fine. No self-deprecating comments, got it.” Carmilla pauses and looks down for a second, “Go on a date with me?”

“Right now? I mean, it’s kind of late, but we could swing it.”

Carmilla laughs and leans forward to give her another kiss, “No. I mean another day. Saturday maybe?”

“Oh.” That makes a lot more sense. “I can do that.”

“Alright, um, perfect.”

They pull back and Laura smiles at the wash of shyness that is suddenly all over Carmilla. She walks over to the dresser that she left the drinks on and grabs them.

“Damn, I didn’t even get to tell you what I wanted to drink.”

Carmilla offers her the glass and smile, “I know, cutie - grape soda.”

She’s not sure why, but it sends the warmest feeling to her chest. Her heart is suddenly racing and she feels like it might burst at any second. Laura calmly and carefully puts the drink down on her night stand. “Alright, get on the bed.”

Carmilla chokes on the drink in her mouth, “Excuse me?”

“You’re being perfect and I over-reacted and honestly I just wanna make out with my girlfriend for an indefinite period of time. So, bed.”

Carmilla wipes her mouth and puts her drink down beside Laura’s glass, “Well, fuck Dr. Pepper then.”

Laura giggles as Carmilla dives onto the bed and pulls Laura down with her.

(November 6th: the start of something great.)

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Laura (8:02pm): I HAVE A GIRLFRIEND!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

LaF (8:03pm): i knew you had it in you :)

Laura (12:26am): well, technically she asked me but...it’s the thought that counts right?

LaF (12:29am): lol that was a pretty delayed response... anyone you happened to be with at the time?

Laura (12:31am): shut up. we’re going to bed now so this conversation will have to continue tomorrow

Laura (12:32am): *I’M going to bed now

Laura (12:33am): alright, whatever... I HAVE A GIRLFRIEND NOW WHO CARES!!!

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The doorbell rings and Laura checks her make-up one last time before running down the stairs. She
gets to the door and hesitates before opening it - maybe she shouldn’t seem so eager. She counts to twenty-seven before there’s another light knock on the door.

“Laura, I know that you’re there. I saw you pass by the side window.”

Laura lightly bangs her fist against her forehead before plastering on a smile and opening the door, “Hey.”

Carmilla is standing on the porch with a small hint of a smile on her lips, her hands tucked into her leather pants.

(Laura should have never told her how much she likes them. She’s not going to survive the night.)

“Hey there. Any reason you were making me wait?”

Laura shrugs, trying to put on her best aloof face, “I was tying my shoes.”

Carmilla looks down, “You’re wearing slip-ons.”

She can feel her face heat and she steps forward to close the door behind her. “Whatever.”

They both stand in an awkward silence before Laura blurts out, “You look great. Like, really great.” Carmilla raises an eyebrow and Laura shakes her head, “You know I think you always look great - but tonight you look especially great? I mean, look at you! Wow. Just-” Carmilla bursts out laughing and Laura blows out a breath, “I’m nervous, okay? Shut up.”

Carmilla steps forward and tucks some hair behind Laura’s ear, “You don’t have to be. It’s just a date.”

“Yeah, but a first date. That’s a lot of pressure.”

Carmilla pauses, “Well, it doesn’t have to be if you don’t want. It can just be... hanging out.”

Laura scrunches up her face, “That sounds so wrong. I don’t want to hang out with my girlfriend,” she shuffles closer and toys with the hem of Carmilla’s shirt, “I want to go on a date with her.”

She looks up and Carmilla is grinning. Carmilla nods, “Okay, a date it is, then.”

"So, where are we going?"

"The grocery store."

Laura bites the inside of her lip, "Wow, you sure know how to romance a girl."

Carmilla rolls her eyes and runs a hand through her hair, "We're going to the grocery store to buy food so I can cook for you.""

Laura beams, pushing away the knot in her stomach, "Okay, that's actually pretty sweet."

"Well, yeah." Carmilla doesn’t sound so confident and Laura wants to just give her a hug.

(Perhaps she's not the only one whose nerves are in knots.)

“I thought about doing some elaborate date, but – I’m happiest just being around you, no matter what we’re doing.” She shrugs, “So, I thought we could stay in and I could make you dinner, then we could marathon that stupid show you love.”
“You’ve watched two seasons of it and don’t pout as much about it anymore – please start referring to it as Doctor Who.”

Carmilla crosses her arms, “Whatever. I’m trying to be-” she makes a face, “romantic or whatever. If you want to do something different I have a back-up date planned that’s a bit more traditional.”

Laura hides her smile as she walks past Carmilla and down the porch steps.

“Um, where are you going?”

Laura turns around and grins, walking a few steps backwards, “The grocery store. Let’s go have the best first date ever.”

Carmilla matches her smile and jogs a bit to catch up with her. “Thanks.”

“Thank you for planning something incredibly sweet.”

The walk is quiet after that, Laura sneaking little glances at Carmilla every few seconds. They’re close and Laura feels her heart pick up a bit every time their hands barely brush against each other. Their hands actually knock into each other and it causes them to look up, apprehension written all over Carmilla’s face. Laura rolls her eyes and shakes her head, reaching over and lacing their fingers.

“This is dumb. We’ve spent the entire week making out – I think we’re allowed to hold hands during a date.”

Carmilla blows out a breath, “I’m sorry, I’m not really the greatest at this.”

Laura gives her hand a squeeze and looks over at her, “I think you’re doing amazing.”

The sight of Carmilla’s small smile wraps a tight grip around her heart.

(If Carmilla keeps smiling at her like that, it won’t matter what they do on the date.)

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Kirsch (7:02pm): wanna come over?

danny L (7:04pm): I’ve been over already a few times this week.

danny L (7:04pm): Don’t you think we should have some sort of rules about this?

Kirsch (7:07pm): oh ya totally

Kirsch (7:08pm): wat should they be

danny L (7:10pm): I don’t know, I’ve never really done this before

Kirsch (7:12pm): k cool. so...maybe instead of making rules u just come over and we figure it out later

danny L (7:24pm): I’ll be over in 20

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Carmilla stills as she feels two warm hands wrap around her waist from behind. Laura settles her chin on Carmilla’s shoulder, “Are you sure you don’t need any help?”
“Laura, you might be great at baking - but you’re a terrible cook.”

She smiles to herself - she knows Laura is pouting without looking. “I’m not that bad.”

“Laura.”

Carmilla feels a sigh against her neck, “Fine. You’re right. I just feel bad. You’re doing everything for our date and I haven’t done anything.”

“Well, you bought me a bag of flour. Which, by the way: talk about girlfriend of the year.”

Laura pinches her stomach and Carmilla turns to grin at her. “I know that you don’t like flowers! It was supposed to be something more meaningful than a random bouquet. It was supposed to be symbolic.”

“Yes, symbolic flour. How stupid of me not to realize.”

“Just because you didn’t remember the significance-”

“I remember everything about you.”

She feels Laura take in a deep breath, “Oh.” Carmilla’s cheeks warm but Laura just wraps her arms tighter around Carmilla’s waist. “I didn’t realize.”

“Well, I do. So your symbolic gesture still stands as being dorky.”

“Whatever - it was romantic,” Laura pauses, “Kind of.”

Carmilla bites the inside of her mouth to stop herself from laughing as she feels Laura step back, “You know what? I’m going to just sit back and let you pamper me.” Carmilla looks over her shoulder as Laura walks back towards the island and hops onto the counter. “I’ll just be supportive from over here,” she motions around herself, “Where I can’t burn anything.”

Carmilla snorts, “You’re ridiculous.”

“No, I’m supportive. And would you look at that. My girlfriend is the best chef in the world.”

"Your girlfriend is just chopping vegetables."

"Well my girlfriend is the best vegetable chopper in the world."

Carmilla puts down the knife and turns to Laura, leaning back against the corner and hiding a smile, "I'm dating a child."

"You're dating a wonderful girl."

"That's debatable."

Laura pouts and swings her legs off the edge of the counter, "You can't be mean to me on our first date."

"Really?" Carmilla walks over and settles herself between Laura's legs, wrapping her arms around her waist, "I didn't get a chance to read the manual before walking over."

Laura shakes her head, "You should have. There are lots of rules."
Carmilla smiles as she traces patterns on the back of Laura's lower back, "Alright. Let me hear them."

"Well," Laura brings her arms up around Carmilla's neck, "We have to be extra nice to each other, give lots of compliments, be really cute in general - you know."

"Oh, of course."

"And obviously: the kissing."

Carmilla's heart picks up, "The kissing?"

"Well, duh - obviously there will be kissing."

"Hmm," she tilts her head, "Call me old-fashioned, but I thought you weren't supposed to kiss on a first date."

Laura bites her lip. "I guess that is true. Maybe we should have no kissing tonight. You know, to preserve the integrity of the date."

Carmilla leans forward, scratching lightly against Laura’s back, “I’m nothing but a woman of my integrity.” She grins as she watches Laura gulp, taking the chance to move forward a little more, “I’m sure there are some loopholes, though.”

“Oh?"

“Mhm,” Carmilla reaches up to move some hair from the side of Laura’s head, “I think we just need to get creative.”

She leans forward presses her lips to the space beneath Laura’s ear.

Laura takes in a sharp breath, “What are you doing?”

“Getting creative.” She trails kisses along Laura’s neck and jaw until she gets to the corner of her lips, “It doesn’t count if it’s not on the lips, right?"

Laura nods quickly, “Yeah, I think there is some sort of-" Carmilla goes back to sucking on the side of Laura’s neck and she smiles against her skin as she feels Laura grip the back of her neck, “Some sort of clause in the rule book about that.”

“Excellent.”

Carmilla takes her time kissing Laura’s neck, grinning every time a soft scrape of her teeth sets off a small noise in the back of Laura’s throat. Laura pulls her up and leans forward to give her a soft kiss on the nose; Carmilla laughs despite herself.

“Maybe we should just skip dinner and start watching Doctor Who.”

Carmilla grins, “You know that the date is still on during our watch, right? Watching your show doesn’t mean we’ll kiss.”

“Yeah, I know - but it does mean neck kisses while we lay around in bed.”

Carmilla bites her lip and groans, “You’re not really playing fair.”

Laura shrugs, “I’m not the one that brought up the rule. Besides,” she nods in the direction of the
stove, “The stuff you have in the oven is probably burning.”

Carmilla turns and looks at the clock on the stove, “Fuck.” She walks to the oven door and sighs as she checks inside, “I’m sorry - I’m fucking this up.”

Laura frowns and hops off the counter, walking over and grabbing Carmilla’s hand, “Hey, hey - you’re not doing anything wrong. It’s not your fault that my neck is extra kissable.”

“Oh my God-”

Laura laughs, “Seriously, it’s okay. We can honestly just skip dinner.”

Carmilla raises her eyebrows, “You haven’t eaten all day.”

Laura pales, “Yes, I have.”

“No, you haven’t,” Carmilla smiles, “I told you not to eat dinner since our date would cover it and you told me that it was great because you haven’t eaten all day.”

“Oh, right. I guess I just forgot.” Laura looks around, “But my stomach is kind of hurting anyway, so don’t worry about it.”

“Laura,” Carmilla frowns and steps forward, trailing her hands up Laura’s arms. “You don’t have to say that just because I fucked up dinner.”

“Right, yeah. I just feel bad.”

Something feels off, but she’s determined to make things right.

“I’ll just order in, okay?”

“Carm, you already spent so much money on groceries,” Laura fidgets, “It’s really not necessary.”

“I’m ordering take-out. Just go with it, Laura.” Laura is giving her that face that she does before she looks like she might cry and she doesn’t understand how she manages to ruin things so quickly.

(She bites down the nagging Laura deserves better, Laura deserves better, Laura deserves better as best as she can.)

Carmilla tries to smile, “I really don’t mind. Shonda gave me that extra shift earlier this week and you practically did half my work for me that night, anyway. So just consider this partly your money, too, okay?”

Laura pouts and sighs, “Okay, fine.”

Carmilla laughs, “God, I’ve never seen someone get so worked up over take-out before.” She leans forward to give a kiss to Laura’s cheek, “But it’s cute.”

Laura’s smile doesn’t quite reach her eyes and Carmilla quickly pulls out her phone to order Chinese, hoping that the rest of the night isn’t so much of a disaster.

(It’s fairly difficult to mess up cuddling and watching TV, but Carmilla doesn’t put it past herself.)

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LaFontaine (9:02pm): hey...can we meet tomorrow by the park
LaFontaine (9:09pm): the same as always, but do you have enough on you to double what I usually pick up?

H (9:15pm): not now. too short notice. i can give you the usual tomorrow and then double by next week

LaFontaine (9:16pm): sounds good

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“I can’t believe we’re watching this crap.”

“Carmilla, it kind of ruins the whole romantic aspect of the date if you complain during every episode.” Carmilla shrugs and Laura cuddles further into her side, mumbling, “There’s no being grumpy on our date.”

“Fine. But, to be fair, you didn’t tell me that the Doctor was going to be a total dick to the new companion.”

Laura scoffs, “He’s not.”

“Martha clearly has feelings for him and all he does is talk about Rose. There’s no way someone can be that oblivious” Carmilla smiles to herself, “Well, there is one person.”

“Who?”

Carmilla doesn’t respond so Laura pulls back and looks up at her, “Carm?”

She lets out a nervous laugh and picks at Laura’s sheets, “You astound me sometimes.”

Laura tilts her head in question and Carmilla rolls her eyes, “I’m talking about you, obviously.”

Laura feels her stomach drop, “Oh.”

Carmilla searches her face, “Wait, what did I say wrong?”

Laura shakes her head and tries to smile, “No, it’s fine. I mean, I know that it took me a while to realize I was gay, and I guess that makes me a bit dense.”

“What?” Carmilla shifts down and on her side so that they’re facing each other, “No, I didn’t mean you being gay. I meant realizing I was into you.”

The vice around her heart loosens, “Oh!” She smiles, “Carm, I hardly call a week of figuring it out oblivious.” Carmilla’s abrupt laugh startles her, “What?”

“It’s just-” Carmilla blows out a deep breath, “You thought that I had only started liking you a week before we kissed?”

Laura nods slowly, “Well, yeah. I mean, around homecoming, right?”

Carmilla shakes her head and plops back onto her back, “Oh God.” She turns to face Laura, “I haven’t been nice to someone in forever, I actually returned your calls and texts, I watched all of your stupid shows - Laura I did a lot of things that I wouldn’t do for anyone else but you.”
“Yeah, but - you were just being... friendly. Right?”

Carmilla stills. “You thought that was me just trying to be friendly?”

“Well if you weren’t just trying to be friendly, then what were you-” Laura’s eyes go wide, “Oh…oh,” She smirks to herself, “Wait, let me get this straight. When I thought you didn’t even want to be my friend, you were actually into me?”

Carmilla reaches over the bed and grabs a pillow, throwing it over her face, “Yes. Now if you don’t mind, could you just stake me now because that would be less mortifying than this conversation.”

“No one is staking anyone.” Laura smiles softly and gently removes the pillow, “This isn’t mortifying, Carm.”

“Yeah, maybe not for you.”

“Wait - so how long?”

“I’m not doing this.”

“Carmilla-”

“Two months.” Laura feels her heart stop, “Maybe a bit less, probably.”

“Yeah, but that means-”

“Yeah.”

“Carm, that’s basically our entire friendship.”

“I know.” Carmilla groans and sits up on her elbows, “I kind of figured when we kissed you put it all together. I didn’t know you literally had no idea or else I wouldn’t have brought it up.”

Laura reaches between them and fiddles with Carmilla’s fingers, “I think it’s incredibly cute.”

“It’s gross.”

“Yes, it is.” Carmilla scowls at her, “You are a gross, giant ball of-” she pretends to gasp, “feelings.”

Carmilla narrows her eyes and rolls over to start tickling Laura’s sides. Laura squeals and swats her hand at her, “Carm!”

“Try telling me I have feelings again and see what happens.”

She continues to tickle her and Laura wheezes for a breath, “You,” she gasps, “have,” another squeal, “feelings.”

Carmilla let’s out a laugh and collapses beside her. They’re both laughing until they turn to face each other, Laura unaware of how close they were.

“Are we still implementing the no kissing on the first date rule?”

Carmilla glances down at her lips before nodding, “We’ve made it this far.”

(Carmilla still leans in.)

Laura bites her lip before reaching up and putting her hand over Carmilla’s mouth. She leans forward
and presses a kiss to her hand, “There.” She can feel Carmilla smiling against her palm and shrugs, “You said to be creative, right?”

Laura removes her hand and Carmilla smiles, sighing out, “I like you so much.”

(Every time feels like the first time - that feeling of flying when she thinks about Carmilla returning her feelings.)

“I really like you, too.”

Carmilla looks down, “You said first dates had to involve compliments, right?”

“Mhm.”

Carmilla grabs onto Laura’s hand and plays with her fingers, pressing a kiss to her thumb, “I love how passionate you are.” Carmilla kisses the knuckle of her index finger, “I love that you are a complete dork who likes nerdy things like Doctor Who.”

Laura scoffs, “It’s not nerdy-”

“Let me finish,” a soft kiss to the knuckle of her middle finger, “I love how much you care about the people in your life - even if some of them don’t deserve it.”

(Laura’s heart feels so heavy.)

Another kiss to her ring finger, “I love that stupid frustrated shake you do when you’re angry.” Laura rolls her eyes as Carmilla presses a kiss to her pinky, “I love that you make me feel comfortable to talk about things.”

Laura feels like she is going to burst, she feels so much. Carmilla brings Laura’s hand up to press one last kiss into the inside of Laura’s palm, “And I love that I get to call you my girlfriend.”

Laura leans forward and rests her forehead against Carmilla’s, “You make me so happy.”

They gravitate towards each other, intertwining their legs as Laura wraps her arms around Carmilla’s neck.

She takes in a shaky breath, “Still no kissing?”

“No,” Carmilla presses forward so that their noses bump, “No kissing.”

Their lips are a breaths-width apart, “I think I might have to re-write the first date rulebook after tonight.” Carmilla lets out a soft laugh and Laura can almost taste her. She clenches the hair at the back of Carmilla’s neck, “But maybe one kiss?”

Carmilla presses a long kiss to Laura’s cheek. Laura pouts, “You know what I meant.”

“I know.” Carmilla smiles and shifts up, opening her arms for Laura to settle in. Laura sighs and curls herself around Carmilla.

“We don’t have to watch Doctor Who anymore.”

“I don’t mind.”

Laura shakes her head and presses a kiss to Carmilla’s collarbone just because, “We can watch something we both like?”
Carmilla leans down and kisses the top of Laura’s head, “Thank God.”

(Laura laughs. She’s never felt so heavy and light at the same time. It’s better than flying.)

They get through three episodes of America’s Next Top Model before Carmilla checks her phone. “Alright, I think it’s time for me to head home.”

Laura leans back, “What? You’re not staying?”

Carmilla shakes her head and swings her legs off the side of the bed, standing up and pocketing her cell phone, “Nope. I’m going home.”

Before Laura can say anything Carmilla is around the other side of the bed, pulling her up by the hand.

She leads them out of Laura’s room, “Wait, Carm-”

“Just go with this, okay?”

Laura rolls her eyes but keeps quiet, letting Carmilla lead her downstairs and in front of her front door. Carmilla slips on her boots and then hovers in front of Laura.

“I had a really great time tonight.”

“Me too. Are you sure you don’t want to just stay over?”

Carmilla shakes her head, “There has to be some sort of rule about not staying over on the first date, right?”

“Well, yes, probably. But,” Laura reaches forward to hold Carmilla by the waist, “I think maybe some of these rules are a bit outdated. You know, they kind of feed into the damaging ideas about gender expectations and double standards that shame women from expressing their sexual agency,” she looks up and Carmilla is trying not to smile, “Don’t you think?”

Carmilla lets out a laugh, “Goodnight, Laura.” She leans forward and Laura holds her breath as she closes her eyes. An embarrassing whine hums at the back of her throat when she feels Carmilla barely brush her lips against the corner of her mouth.

When she opens her eyes Carmilla is already out the door and closing it behind her. Laura blows out a long breath and steps forward, locking the door and thudding her forehead against the wood. It takes four thuds before she feels a knock against the door. She moves back and scrambles to unlock and open it. Carmilla is leaning against the doorframe and gives her a small smile, “Hi.”

“What is it?”

“Well, I’m not here as your girlfriend anymore. I’m here as your best friend. So, considering it isn’t breaking any rules, I was just wondering - can I stay the night?”

Laura feels a squeeze in her chest, “Does this mean the date is officially over?”

“I think it does.”

Laura rushes forward and cups Carmilla’s cheeks. Carmilla laughs into her mouth and they both burst into soft giggles as Carmilla fumbles over her boots from the force of Laura pushing her back. Laura turns them so that Carmilla is pushed against the wall, kissing her with enough force to make up for hours worth of pent-up frustration.
“Laura, Laura,” Carmilla gently pushes her back. Her cheeks are flushed and Laura has to bite the inside of her cheek hard to stop herself from pressing forward again.

“What’s wrong?”

“As much as I love being thrown against a wall by someone who actually cares about me-” Laura winces, “Carm.”

“I’m just saying - maybe we should take this inside.”

Laura makes a face, “Sorry. I, uh, got a little excited there.”

Carmilla smiles and shakes her head, reaching up to run her hand through Laura’s hair, “That’s fine. I am very okay with excited. And with making out in public. But your dad doesn’t know, and I don’t think he’d appreciate coming home to his daughter being defiled on his front porch.”

“Well, technically I’m the one doing the defiling, so-”

“Laura,” Carmilla laughs and presses forward to give Laura another few kisses, “If we go inside now we can continue this on a comfortable bed.”

Laura nods, “I like how you think.” She rushes backwards and tugs Carmilla inside by the hand.

Carmilla laughs again, “Laura, just-” Laura continues to tug on her hand and Carmilla squeezes back while standing her ground, “Just give me a second to take off my shoes.”

Laura turns and shakes her head, “Carm, we don’t have much time.”

“There is literally no time limit on this.”

“I know that - but I’ve already had to wait all night.”

Carmilla suddenly stops taking off her boots and steps forward. Laura takes in a deep breath at the sudden lack of space between them, gulping as Carmilla reaches up and cups the back of her neck.

She leans in close, her lips barely brushing against Laura’s, “Patience, cupcake.”

Laura groans as Carmilla pulls back before she could give her a proper kiss. She smiles as she gets an idea, “Since you seem to be in the teasing mood, two can play at that game.”

Carmilla hops on one foot as she pulls off one boot, “What do you mean?”

“If you wanna kiss me, you’ll have to catch me.”

“Laura.”

Laura bounds towards the stairs, “I’m taking a head start!” She giggles as she hears Carmilla swear under her breath, followed by the quick thud of Carmilla running behind her to catch up.

“You’re dead, Laura.”

“Only if you catch me!”

They make it to the top of the stairs and Laura fumbles with the doorknob. She feels a slight pinch at her hips and she yelps, turning and giggling into Carmilla’s kiss.
“Caught you.”

Laura leans back and wonders when this overwhelming feeling is going to leave her chest, “Yeah, you did.”

Carmilla smiles at her and she quickly reaches behind her to open the door. They stumble into the room in a mess of laughter and hair-tugging and kisses.

(Best. Date. Ever.)

-----

"So I'm thinking of planning our next family vacation."

Will cuts a big piece of steak and shoves it into his mouth, grinning around his fork, "I vote on Rome again."

Carmilla snorts and their mom raises her eyebrow, "I don't think I'm even allowed back in Rome with the pair of you."

He looks at Carmilla and they share a grin. She raises her hands up, "Hey, that was all Will."

"What? I only jumped in because you dared me to!"

She shrugs, "No proof of that, buddy."

Their mom sighs around a smile, swirling the wine in her glass. "That was a fun trip, wasn't it Carmilla?"

"Yeah, I suppose." She spears a few pieces of pasta before the corner of her mouth lifts, "The vision of you jumping in the fountain after us will always be a gem of mine."

His mom stares at Carmilla for a few seconds before they both break out into laughter.

"Well what kind of mother would I be if I just let my children get arrested?"

Carmilla shakes her head but the smile never leaves her face and it warms his heart. He loves these dinners - when they all get along together and it feels like they're a real family. He wishes they had more moments like this.

He turns to Carmilla, "Carmilla, why don't you come to Vermont with us this year?"

He watches as she grips her glass and brings it up to her lips, taking a few moments to answer. "No chance."

He slumps in his seat and turns to his mom, "Make her come with us, Mom."

"Carmilla doesn't like those trips. I'm not going to make her do something she doesn't want to do."

"But Mom-"

She shakes her head, "The answer is no."

Carmilla loosens her grip on the glass and offers a small smile, "Thanks, Mom."

Will plays with the food on his plate, "Well maybe I don't feel like going anymore."
His mom laughs in response and he rolls his eyes. "You're only 14, so if I say you're going then you're going." She turns to Carmilla and smiles, "She is almost 18 so she can do what she wants."

He looks to Carmilla and she sticks her tongue out. He sighs, "Right, so mature."

His mom reaches forward and covers Carmilla's hand with her own, "You've grown up to be such a wonderful young woman."

He watches as she internally debates with herself. Carmilla has a bad habit of avoiding compliments, especially from his mom.

(He just wishes they got along better.)

Acceptance wins out as Carmilla moves her hand to give their Mom's a squeeze. They share a smile and it's one of the brief moments he feels hope.

(They're family, they just need some time to get there.)

He leans forward in his seat, "Come on, Carm. Just come to Vermont, it'll be fun."

"William." His mom levels him with a stare intense enough to make him sink in his seat, "Leave your sister alone. Besides - these trips are like our Mother-son bonding time."

"Well, maybe Carmilla could come so she doesn't feel left out?"

Carmilla barks out a laugh, "Left out of spending more time with a nerd like you? Sounds like paradise to me, actually."

He scowls at her and his mom smiles, "There you go. Plus, Carmilla and I already spend a lot of one-on-one time together since you've become quite the social butterfly."

(He thinks of hanging out with Travis yesterday at the mall and feels his cheeks flush.)

"Yeah, we do. So don’t worry, loser. I’m not missing much in Vermont.” Carmilla wipes the corner of her mouth with her napkin and suddenly gets up, “I’m just going to use the bathroom.”

His mom nods at her, “Okay, I’ll order your favourite dessert when the waiter comes by, sweetheart.”

She walks to the bathroom and he can see the way her shoulders slump the farther she gets from the table. He frowns to himself and sighs into his water.

(They aren’t there yet, but - someday. He hopes.)

-----

“So, Dad. I kind of want to tell you something.”

There’s an ominous tone to Laura’s voice and it makes Mark’s stomach sink. He turns the corner of the street and when they get to the red light he looks over at her with concern, “Everything okay, kiddo?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m fine.”
“Okay, good.” They start driving again and he notices Laura drumming her fingers against her thigh. He frowns - she only does that when she’s nervous.

“So what’s up?”

“Well, I’ve been doing a lot of soul-searching lately and have come to realize something. And, it may come as a shock to you, but I assure you that I have thought this through and am fairly sure about it. And - I know I’m young! But that’s okay and actually quite common in these types of things, so I don’t want you to think that I’m just some crazy hormonal teenager who doesn’t know what she’s talking about. And I did research, too! I swear I did. And it was very informative and.”

“Laura.” He pulls into a parking spot in front of the grocery store and turns off the car.

She takes a deep breath, “Yes?”

“Whatver you say, I’m here for you.” He reaches over and holds his hand out palm up. She gives him a small smile and puts her hand in his. “You and me against the world, remember?”

She nods, “I’m gay.” Her eyes widen and she blows out a long breath, “Holy crap, I can’t believe I just said that.”

He smiles as wide as he can, “I’ll excuse that language since this is kind of a big moment.”

She beams at him and dramatically throws her head back against the car seat, “Oh God, I feel like I’m going to throw up.”

“Gay or not - it doesn’t give you permission to ruin the interior of my baby.”

She laughs and hits the side of his arm. She appreciates his humour just like her mother did and he has the sudden urge to protect her from all the terrors this world has to offer. He squeezes her hand, “I’m happy you trusted me enough to tell me.”

“Thanks, dad.”

She takes off her seat belt and scrambles across the console to give him a tight hug. He wraps his arms around her and pushes back the thoughts of what this would have been like if she had two parents to love and support her unconditionally.

(He’ll just have to make sure he steps up and does the job twice as well.)

He kisses the top of her head and gives an extra squeeze before asking, “So, does this have anything to do with Carmilla?”

She stills against him and he tries not to laugh.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I’m just saying: if you’re dating her then you have my permission. She’s a great kid.”

She pulls back quickly and levels him with a look. Uh oh.

“Well, first off, I’m a perfectly capable woman, Dad. I don’t need your permission on who I do or do not date.”

He shifts in his seat and braces himself for the worst. While Mark does enjoy his daughter’s feminist rants, he does always come out of them feeling like he’s committed 15 different crimes - and this is
already not starting off the greatest.

“It was just a joke, Laura. I respect and stand by your decisions.” He offers her a smile.

(He hopes she takes the peace offering.)

“But I mean, you and Carmilla,” he raises his eyebrows at her, “I’m not blind.”

She tenses and crosses her arms, “Dad, it’s kind of offensive to just assume that I’m dating a good friend of mine just because we’re both gay.”

“No, Laura - I didn’t mean anything offensive by that.” He scratches the back of his neck, “It’s just, you do spend a lot of time together and-”

“Well, yeah! Because she’s my best friend.”

Laura is looking at him with her unrelenting look of determination and although he’s been on the force for more years than he can remember, this is always the scariest thing he’s ever been up against.

(This is definitely, definitely not looking good.)

“You know it’s actually very damaging to have that kind of attitude. It discourages queer friendships amongst people of the same genders and completely fetishizes them.”

Oh boy. He doesn’t understand half the words she’s saying.

(He needs to call Barb later and get her to translate this conversation for him.)

“Laura, I would never want to offend you. I promise you that.”

She nods and straightens up, “Well, good.” She fiddles with her fingers, “So, um, you’re okay then? For sure?”

He nods quickly, “Of course. Who you fall for doesn’t matter to me. I’ll still love you no matter what.”

He can see the tension leave her shoulders and is glad she went from attack-mode to grateful. “Thanks.” She has her hand on the door handle but pauses, “And, um, same for me, Dad. It doesn’t matter who you fall for, either. I’ll still love you.”

He can feel tears prick the corners of his eyes and he tries to laugh it off, “Well, I’m straight as a board, kid.”

She tilts her head and gives him a look, “Dad.” She chews on her lip, “She wouldn’t care. It’s been a long time.”

He takes in a deep breath and clenches his fist a few times. He hates the heavy feeling that lives above his ribs, quietly settling in for the past six years.

“Looks like we both were keeping some secrets, huh?”

She smiles and shrugs, “Yeah, but we’re being honest now so that’s all that matters.” He laughs and she grins, “So does this mean you’re finally going to ask her out?”

“Woah,” he raises his hands for a second, “Let’s not jump the gun, here. She’s probably not even
interested in me.”

Her eyes light up and she shrugs, “You never know unless you try.” She gives him a face that usually means she’s ready to let him down gently about something and he’s not sure how much more he can handle from one conversation.

“Which - while we’re still kind of on topic of honesty, there’s just one more thing. And - honestly, you’re really going to laugh at this because in hindsight it is kind of funny.”

He blows out a breath, “Alright, just hit me with it. As long as you’re not pregnant I can handle anything.”

“Dad.”

“Sorry, sorry - go ahead.”

“Well, I know we just discussed Carmilla and I kind of freaked out on you, but - okay, here is the funny part: so it turns out that we are dating.”

He clenches his jaw, “Laura.”

“I’m sorry! I just - I panicked and got on the defensive and to be fair the kind of ideologies that I talked about are damaging to gay kids. It’s just - in my case - it doesn’t really apply since it kind of...was true.”

(He’s going to get an early heart attack from this kid.)

He sighs and rolls his eyes, “Does she treat you well?”

She raises an eyebrow, “I thought you respected my decisions?”

“I do - but I’m still your father.” She twists her mouth and tries not to grin, but he continues, “So I’ll ask again: does she treat you well?”

“Oh obviously, Dad. If she didn’t then I wouldn’t be dating her.”

He nods. It doesn’t surprise him at all but it still is reassuring to hear, “Good.” He unbuckles his seatbelt and claps his hand on his thigh, “Alright, now that that’s out of the way we have a long grocery trip to discuss all the new rules of the house I’ll be implementing.”

She grins and opens the car door, “Sorry, Dad. Not sure if we’ll have time for that today, we’ve got a lot to shop for!”

Before he can say another word she skips out the door and slams it behind her. She’s already grabbing a cart when he thuds his head back against the headrest and closes his eyes.

He definitely needs to call Barb for advice on this. He remembers Laura’s encouraging words and smiles to himself.

(It feels good to know that that might not be the only reason he calls her now.)

Chapter End Notes
This chapter was written by Olivia. Track the tumblr tags [#hsau updates] for chapter updates and [#carmilla hsau] for general updates on the AU.

Fool's Gold updates ONCE A WEEK on FRIDAYS 5-6PM EST.
This girl will actually be the death of her. If Laura puts yet another stop to this make out session, Carmilla thinks she’ll probably die, or have some kind of stroke, because Laura keeps making satisfied little noises into her mouth every time Carmilla moves her hands to Laura’s thighs and squeezes, pulling her closer into her lap. This is the part where Laura keeps pulling back — to talk, or to laugh, or to breathe — just when things start to get mildly interesting.

Laura moves her lips to Carmilla’s neck and she’s actually grateful for the interruption when it comes — as much as she loves the graze of Laura’s teeth against her skin, she doesn’t expect her mother would appreciate a bruise she hadn’t put there herself. It’s not a situation she’s eager to explain. When Laura pulls back, she doesn’t complain.

“Okay, I’m about to say something really petty and jealous and just, well, completely childish, actually.” Laura kisses her again, since this is pretty much their only method of communication these days. Talk. Kiss. Talk some more. Kiss some more. “Like, totally childish.” Another kiss. “And really petty, I mentioned petty already.”

Carmilla thinks she can say whatever she damn well pleases as long as Laura keeps sucking on her lower lip like this.

“And you’re not allowed to hold it against me or bring it up later, because I’m completely aware of how immature I’m being, and also because I said so.”

Carmilla’s hands move to cup Laura’s cheeks and she kisses her once, just enough to make it count, before she lets her pull back again. “Wanna spit it out sometime this week?”

“Am I a better kisser than Elsie?”

(Why is she not surprised?)

“Elsie who?”

Confusion flashes across her face and she can see the words “you know who” written all over Laura’s expression until it fades into a smile and she kisses her again. “Okay. Good answer.”

Laura shifts against her and Carmilla sinks back against the couch while they kiss. When Laura gets
dangerously close to leaving another mark — this time just below her jaw — Carmilla pushes against her shoulder.

“What about me? Better than Kirsch?”

Laura sits up straighter, and it’s the cause of a significant amount of unintentional friction. Laura laughs, and she’s not sure if it’s in response to her question or just her nervous habit.

“Better than seven minutes in a closet at Betty Spielsdorf’s thirteenth birthday party?” Laura hums into another kiss. “Much.”

It’s another few minutes of kissing before they get back to the same place they keep stopping at — Laura’s hands in her hair, Carmilla gripping at her sides, scratching the fabric of Laura’s jeans over her thighs. Laura pushes her back into the couch, their chests pressed together and straight up moans into her mouth. It’s soft, but it’s there, and Laura pulls back almost immediately.

“Tell me about your first kiss.” Laura's chest heaves against hers and her breath is hot against Carmilla's skin.

She takes a second to catch her breath. “Isn’t it rude to talk about ex-girlfriends with current girlfriends?”

Laura frowns. “I’m just asking about one of your exes.” She doesn’t miss her tone of voice — it’s pouty and a little bitter.

Carmilla takes pity on her. “I only have one ex.”

“Elsie?”

“She doesn’t count.”

“Okay.” She thinks about that. “How many girls have you not counted?”

“Laura.”

She sighs and sits back a little. Laura gives her a quick peck on the lips before she shifts her weight towards her left side, swinging her body back towards the couch.

Carmilla’s lap feels cold now, and she’s not thrilled about the lack of touching.

“Just tell me about your first kiss. I don’t even know who gave it to you.” Laura reaches a hand to the coffee table and brings her tardis mug to her lips. Carmilla wishes they could screw the talking and just get back to kissing. She wants to see if Laura tastes like grape soda, or whatever she has in that cup. She leans towards her and Laura meets her halfway for a soft kiss.

Grape soda, just like she thought.

Laura turns on her side and lets her head fall back against the couch. “C’mon, I wanna know about you.”

“You know more about me than anyone does.” It’s not a lie if she doesn’t count her mother.

“Please? First kiss, come on. Spill, I want details.”

Carmilla drums her fingers over the leg Laura still has across her lap. “Her name was Ell.” It’s almost a strange thing to think about her again. She hasn’t thought of her in ages. Not anything real,
anyway. Maybe in passing, but it’s never been so easy to say her name before. “In middle school we were...” She laughs softly. “Best friends.”

When she looks up, Laura is watching her intently, nodding. Carmilla supposes she really does have a type.

“It wasn’t a big deal or anything. I think I kissed her in her backyard or something. We were just trying things out. Her parents weren’t very accepting of me. And then there was my mother — well, I’m sure you can connect those dots.”

Laura’s shoulders slump. “Right.”

“I don’t think we ever dated. But we were more than friends. It was just, ” She shrugs, “A lot of kissing behind closed doors. Holding hands under desks. Wearing each others clothes.”

Laura bites her lip and toys with Carmilla’s fingers for a moment. “I came out to my Dad.”

“Laura, that wasn’t—”

“No, I know. I know, I just thought you should know. He knows about us,” Laura looks down. “If that... matters to you.”

It does. It really does. “What does he think?”

“He thinks you’re using your romantic wiles to take advantage of me and you’re a horrible, horrible influence, bound to lead me astray any day now.”

She almost falls for it.

Carmilla narrows her eyes. “You think you’re so funny.”

“I think I’m cute.” Laura corrects her. “And my Dad thinks you’re amazing.”

It’s not like her heart swells or anything, but — “Yeah?”

“I believe the words great kid were used last night when we were talking about you.”

She grins. “Good.” That’s when she decides they’re done talking, because this is all getting far too close to the after school special vibe she refuses to be a part of, and Carmilla slips a hand around Laura’s neck and leans in to pull her back into another kiss. Laura blindly aims for the coffee table with her mug. Whether she finds it or not, her hand is free of the drink and gripping Carmilla’s thigh in the next moment — that’s nice. She rewards her by dropping her kisses to Laura’s jaw and neck.

She could listen to Laura trying to control her own volume all day long.


“This is horrible kissing talk, sweetheart.” She can’t even lean in before she gets caught in the way Laura softens.

“You don’t have to tell me.”

Yes, she does. She takes one look at the same eyes that have been open to her since the day they met and yes, she does.

“My mother happened.” Carmilla looks away and shrugs. “Then she moved away.”
“Do you still have feelings for her?”

Her eyes snap back to Laura, more insecure than ever before, which might be a look for the record books at this point.

“Laura?”

“Yeah?”

“I have feelings for you.” Maybe she should get used to having this conversation. It’s come up at least four times now. “Please wipe off that kicked puppy look on your face.”

“Right.” Laura laughs and shakes her head. “Right, stupid question. So stupid.”

“Can we go back to kissing now?”

Laura grins. “Yes, please.”

She’s more eager this time than Carmilla expected. Her eyebrows raise in a more than pleasant surprise when Laura slips her tongue into Carmilla’s mouth. She returns the favor and cups the back of Laura’s head to hold her in place while they pour themselves into the kiss. It’s moments like these that leave her wondering why they ever do anything but kiss now that they’ve figured out how good they are together.

Okay, maybe not that good. It’s still clumsy sometimes.

Laura struggles against their combined weight to push them down on the couch, but Carmilla can feel the pain in her shoulder spike from where she had landed at the bottom of the stairs the night before. It doesn’t feel good and it feels even worse when Laura tries to lay her back against the armrest. Before she can put any real effort into it, Carmilla pushes back to stop her. There’s a bit of a struggle and a fair amount of elbowing, but Laura smiles against her mouth through it all, so she doesn’t let herself get embarrassed.

Carmilla takes the initiative the moment their kissing gets heated again. She pushes Laura back against the couch and lays down on top of her. This is good. This has the potential to be a lot worse. There’s no pain in this position. It’s both awkward and clumsy to kiss like this — neither of them have really gotten the hang of kissing on the couch. Their positions are awkward and their hand placement is awkward and the kissing is hot, but still awkward. The bed is easier territory to master. Lots of space. Lots of pillows. No armrests. No remote controls digging into anyone’s side.

Laura’s hands move from Carmilla’s sides to her back. The feeling of a warm hand sliding underneath the back of her shirt is enough to shock her into pulling away for half a moment.

Laura takes advantage. “I wish you were my first kiss,” she whispers.

“I can be your first other things.”

Laura’s hands are more confident than any part of Carmilla. Her fingers slide further up the back of her shirt. Maybe that was too much too soon. It feels like too much too soon. This time Carmilla comes up with the distraction.

“Why — was kissing Kirsch in a closet not your cup of tea?”

Laura laughs. “On the contrary, actually. Seventh grade Laura thought seven minutes in heaven with the most popular guy in school was exactly her cup of tea.”
Carmilla presses a long kiss to her lips and lingers for a moment. “And now?”

She thinks about it. “And now I drink coffee.”

“That was good.” She laughs into Laura’s neck and presses a kiss to her pulse point. “You come up with that yourself?”

“I might have read it on the internet.”

When she comes up for air, she laughs. “Too predictable, Hollis.”

“Shut up.”

Carmilla pushes herself up to take a minute and look at Laura — flushed cheeks, wide eyes, and disheveled hair. “Coffee tastes better anyway,” She says with another kiss.

—

Things are tense.

Sure, they go through phases of things being tense. They’re Perry and LaFontaine, after all.

(Emphasis on the Perry. LaFontaine is usually only tense if Perry is.)

But right now things are especially tense. All they can hear is the clinking of spoons in cereal bowls and the blanket of silence over them. Silence is just a lack of noise reverberating off other objects, they know that, but this silence is loud. And they can feel it.

Perry’s mother left for work a few minutes ago and now they’re eating breakfast before school — it’s their usual routine, but Perry has something on her mind. LaFontaine knows it.

“I want to talk to you about something.”

And there it is.

“Thank God. It’s been getting kinda stuffy in here.” LaFontaine jokingly tugs on the side of their collar.

“This isn’t a joke, LaFontaine.”

Wow. The feeling of their entire chest sinking into their stomach is really something; as much of a placebo as they know it is, it’s something. “Alright. Is something wrong?”

“I think so.” Perry puts her spoon down. “I’m not stupid, you know. Just because I like to pretend things are fine and normal and okay, it doesn’t mean that I believe it.”

They nod. “I know that. Perr, you’re the smartest girl I know. Come on.”

“Oh, good.” She plasters a fake smile on her face and nods. “Good. So you think that I’m smart. Of course. Good. Great.” One look at her face and LaFontaine knows things are the opposite of good. She looks like she’s on the verge of a mental breakdown, actually. “So you just think that I don’t care about you. Great.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Something’s wrong!” She snaps. Perry takes a deep breath before she starts again, barely keeping
her voice calm. “Something’s wrong. Something about you is changing. Something’s happening and
you won’t tell me, but you don’t think I’m too stupid to know, so clearly you just think that I don’t
care.”

They swallow. “Perr, nothing is wrong.” To be fair, they gave that lie a valiant effort, but it’s hard to
keep their cool with Perry falling apart.

“Stop lying to me. Just stop it. I’m not...” She wipes at her eyes and shakes her head. “Asking you to
tell me. I’m not forcing it out of you. This has been going on for weeks. I thought if I just pretended
it was fine, things would go back to being normal. But I’m done pretending. And if you want to keep
pretending, that’s your prerogative. But I’m done.” A second later, she adds, “Pretending. You
could, too.”

LaF looks down at their unfinished bowl of cereal. ”We're gonna be late for school, Perr.”

—

“You shouldn’t sit next to me in class.”

Kirsch looks up from the paper airplane he’s been carefully crafting and raises his eyebrows in that
way that makes his eyes look softer. For a second she thinks he looks vulnerable. “I sit next to you in
econ.”

He does. It used to annoy her.

Danny rolls her eyes. “We don’t share econ with half the people we’ve ever met.” Her eyes scan the
room and land on Laura and Carmilla’s desk on the other side of the class.

“Dude, nobody knows, don’t worry about it.”

Danny scoffs. She does what she can to make a laugh sound condescending. “Laura has her
suspicions. Even you should have caught on to that.”

He sits up. “Hey. What’s that supposed to mean?”

“How do you keep an idiot in suspense?”

Kirsch shrugs. “I don’t know. How?”

She grins. “How do you keep an idiot in suspense?”

He rolls his eyes. “I just told you, I don’t know.”

Kirsch leans back and crosses his arms over his chest with a smile. “And people call me the dumb
one.”

_Incredible._

They both turn to look at Laura together. She has her hand under the table as if that does anything to
hide the fact that she and Carmilla are holding hands.

Clearly, Ebony Dark'ness Dementia Raven Way is too cool for public hand holding.

God, she can already hear Laura in her ear. _You're one to talk._

She’s not. But it's Carmilla she's dealing with here and she's honor bound to mock anyone that
pretentious.

Mr. Beckett says something about their next assignment and Laura looks up to pay attention, giving Carmilla the chance to press a kiss against Laura's shoulder and turn back to scribbling in her notebook.

Kirsch nudges her side. "I'm pretty sure a plane could like, land in the middle of this classroom and Laura wouldn't even notice."

That makes them both laugh, and as much as she hates to think it, Kirsch is right. Any sane person paying attention would be panicking right now because Danny and Kirsch laughing together should be a sign of the apocalypse. Danny wonders if she should start stocking non-perishables just in case.

"I have no idea how Laura managed to score the second hottest ch— ... girl in school."

Danny smiles. She's singlehandedly training the words "chick" and "hottie" out of his vocabulary. So idiots can learn.

"Hottest is me right?"

He doesn't hesitate. "Totally."

Another smile from Danny. What can she say, she's having a good day. "Well, it's not like we didn't see it coming."

"We totally did, didn't we?" He sounds proud of himself and Danny rolls her eyes. She opens her mouth to tell him not to strain his arm patting himself on the back, but Mr. Beckett gives them both a pointed look and then sits in his swivel chair at the front of the class to flip through one of his power points.

"For those of you who have actually read the syllabus," He starts, and Danny doesn't even have to look to know Perry is the only one sitting up proudly in her seat right now. Kirsch shifts in his seat and they share an uneasy glance. "You should know we have another project due before the break."

The class breathes a collective sigh of relief. It's not a pop quiz and thank God. Her grade probably couldn't survive another failed quiz.

"Today we start chapter four, can anyone tell me what chapter four is about?" Crickets. The shuffle of converse on the tile floor. Nobody speaks. "Has anyone even read chapter four?" Not even Perry speaks up. "Anyone?" Mr. Beckett sighs and rubs a hand down his face. "I should have been a mechanic. Ten bonus points to the first person who can tell me a single thing about chapter four of your textbook."

The room floods with the sounds of pages being flipped as everyone digs into their textbooks at once, except Carmilla, who inevitably ignores the teacher in favor of playing with a strand of Laura's hair. She stops when everyone turns to stare at them, because it's Laura that speaks first.

"Eating disorders."

"Thank you, Laura. Can you tell me anything about eating disorders?"

Laura sinks in her seat. "Not really."

Danny rolls her eyes at Beckett, who's already sighing like Laura is the world's biggest inconvenience. Teachers like him piss her off. They don't teach a thing and then act exasperated
when students — surprise, surprise — don't know what they're talking about.

Beckett flips through his powerpoint outlining the project rubric and doing an overview of the chapter.

"You can pick your partners, but I don't want to see any funny business this time."

She's suddenly reminded of the Jurassic Park movies and those scenes where people hide behind cars and the massive T-Rex teeth slowly creep into view just inches from where people are hiding. She thinks the way Kirsch pushes himself into her line of vision the moment Beckett says "pick your partners" reminds her of that T-Rex.

He raises his eyebrows and she rolls her eyes. Maybe. At least if they fail this project too she can blame it all on him.

Beckett keeps flipping through his slides, skimming through the material in a monotone voice.
"Anorexia nervosa. Bulimia nervosa. Binge eating disorder. Variations of each. Causes, symptoms, treatments. This is a broad subject ladies and gentlemen; I expect to see a lot of effort put into your projects. Pick a topic. I'm looking for a ten to fifteen slide powerpoint. Ten sources. And a presentation poster.

Kirsch bumps her shoulder with his whispers, "C'mon, D-Bear, do it with me."

Ignoring the obvious innuendo, Danny laughs at him. "D-Bear? That's how you think you'll convince me to tolerate you on another project?"

"I'm trying things out. I think it works for you."

"It doesn't."

"I'll stop calling you D-Bear if you agree." He almost bounces in his seat out of excitement.

"Fine."

"Sweet. You won't regret it, D-Bear."

She narrows her eyes.

"D-Tiger?"

"Danny."

Kirsch nods. "Got it. Danny." He's still grinning when Beckett comes around to hand out the rubric.

"Eating disorders are serious. This is a serious project and I expect serious effort. Don't screw this up." He drops the rest of the rubrics on his front desk and turns around, crossing his arms over his chest. "Maybe you'll learn something this time."

—

It's only when she reaches the playground that Carmilla realizes who she's been looking at since she stepped on the field. She's been walking and squinting for the most part, trying to see who's hanging out on her playground. It's dark and some idiot is sitting on a swing, smoking a cigarette.

When she reaches the playground she sees it's her idiot.
"Will?"

He stands up and whips around to face her, the cigarette still hanging out of the corner of his mouth. She takes it from his mouth.

"What the hell is this?" God, she came here to relax, not have a heart attack. "You're an idiot, what's wrong with you?"

"How did you know I was here?"

She didn't. "Lucky guess. Since when do you smoke?" She takes in what he's wearing — jeans, a white shirt, a leather jacket. "I'm going to regret caring here, but what the hell is this?"

He shrugs. "I'm practicing."

"For what, your John Travolta audition? I know your overgrown beefcake bro is into Grease, but I don't think he swings that way."

"Shut up, some people think it's hot. And I'm not doing it for Kirsch, alright?"

Carmilla stares at the cigarette between her fingers. She really hates being a babysitter. He was easier to handle when he was ten and she could distract him with a Klondike bar.

"You're telling me your rebellious phase is rearing it's fucked up head right now so you can impress some guy?"

He shoves his hands in his pockets and avoids the question. "When did you have your rebellious phase?"

She lowers her hand but hangs on to the cigarette. "My whole life is a rebellious phase."

Will laughs and rolls his eyes. "I'm impressed. You genuinely think you're that cool, don't you?"

She steps back until her back hits the pole that holds up the swingset. She leans against it and looks down at the cigarette in her hand. "I'm cooler than you." Carmilla brings the cigarette to her lips and sucks in a breath of smoke.

It's not easy to smoke. She's tried it once or twice — her mother smokes, she always has cigarettes somewhere in the house. She doesn't have to ask Will where he got a pack for himself. It usually goes just like this. She breathes it in and can't get over the sense of breathing something foreign. It feels like something between air and water and the sense of drowning is too much. She tries to inhale but she can't control the coughing fit it brings.

Maybe next time.

Through coughs, she hears Will laugh. "Yeah, I can see that."

Carmilla lets the cigarette drop to the ground and she stomps on it for good measure.

Her eyes water and her throat feels dry, but she moves past it. "Listen, if you want to act like an idiot and ruin your life, get a flask. Get hooked on cheap liquor, not something that'll kill you."

"What the hell do you care?"

She laughs and pushes herself off the pole, sliding her hand down a swing chain. "Wow, you've
gone full-blown dick now, haven't you."

"Shut up."

"God, we are so related. You sure as hell didn't get that from Mom."

Will decides to take the strong and silent type route, one she knows too well. Carmilla sits on the swing.

"You know what? You want to fuck up your life, be my guest. But I'm not letting you get addicted to something that's gonna kill you just so you can impress a boy."

Will looks at her. He's pouting, but he's listening. That's all she needs.

"Besides, I might need a kidney from you one day."

He valiantly fights a smile and settles on a low blow. "Like you've never done something you didn't want to do just to impress some girl."

Touché.

Will messes with the chain of the swing next to hers. "How's that going, by the way? You guys are together now, right? I see you around school all the time. And you're not home a lot, but when you are, you seem..."

"I seem what?"

"Like you're getting laid." He says with a smirk.

Carmilla grins.

"So are you?"

She plays dumb to mess with him. "Am I getting laid?"

"Are you with her? But yeah, I guess the other thing, too."

Carmilla kicks at the wood chips at her feet. "I'm with her. And as for the other thing... That's for me to know and for you to mind your own business."

"That's a no." Will grins and takes a seat in the swing next to her. "Have you told Mom?"

She gives him a pointed look.

He remembers Ell, then. She can see it in his eyes. "Yeah, I guess not, huh?"

"She doesn't need to know."

"What if you marry Laura, will you tell her then?"

She rolls her eyes. "Why the hell would I be thinking about marriage?"

"I don't know, but it's probably the same reason you smile when you talk about her. Even when you're not getting any."

"I'm getting more than you."
Will shuts his mouth for a few peaceful seconds before he starts to talk again. Not talk, sing.

"Carmilla and Laura, sittin' in a tree," He starts to sing softly, "K-I-S-S-I-N-G."

"You're a child, William."

"First comes love, then comes marriage."

"You know what, smoke a pack a day, see if I care."

Will starts to laugh at his own joke and Carmilla resists the urge to pour coffee over all his favorite shoes. Teenage boys love shoes. She wonders if he would cry.

"Hey, if you ever get married, I'm totally the best man, right?"

Carmilla kicks off from the ground and absentmindedly lets her swing move. "Girls don't get a best man."

"But aren't you the guy in the relationship?"

Carmilla smiles. Laura would have some very serious words to say to that kind of implication. Besides, Laura kind of wears the pants when it comes to just about anything. She's okay with that.

"Did you actually just say that?"

"What?"

She rolls her eyes. "Are you gonna be the girl in your relationships?"

Will makes a face. "Okay. You made your point."

They slip into a comfortable silence for a while. A cold breeze hits them and Carmilla finds herself a little jealous of Will’s jacket. It’s definitely cheesy, but she can’t resist thinking about Laura now that Will’s mentioned her. The wedding thing — that’s too much to think about right now. The entire concept is enough to scare the life out of her. Laura in a white dress, walking down the aisle next to her father, probably in some fancy church or something. All of Laura’s annoying friends waiting for her at the front, next to Carmilla. She doesn’t know what she would wear, but it wouldn’t be about her anyway. It would be about Laura and the life she wants.

Carmilla couldn’t care less about marriage, obviously.

It’s all too much to think about right now. Way too soon.

"Hey, Will?"

"Yeah?"

"If I get married... You'll be in the wedding."

He grins. "Knew it."

"If. She shakes her head to herself. This is pointless. "And only if you don't off yourself before that just to impress some guy."

"Got it." He smiles in a dangerous way, like he's about to torture her somehow — and he does. He starts to sing again. "Then comes a baby in a carriage."
Carmilla groans and pushes him off his swing.

—

Laura smiles when Carmilla groans against her mouth.

"You're doing it again."

"Doing what?" She feigns innocence and kisses Carmilla's jaw.

"Distracting us." She says through grit teeth. Her frustration isn't sincere enough for Laura to care.

She tilts Carmilla's head to kiss down her neck until she finds a bruise underneath her jaw — something like a hickey but not quite.

Laura brushes her thumb across it. "Did I do this?"

Carmilla tenses. "No." And then after a second, "Don't worry about it."

"God, Carm, I'm sorry—"

"I said don't worry about it."

Carmilla kisses her again and tries to work with the fact that Laura has somehow worked her way into her lap again. She’s usually not complaining, really, but this time they’re in public. In a library. In the school library. Where her Mother could walk in, if she was the kind of principal who bothered to roam the halls on a semi-regular basis. Even so, the possibility is enough to give her pause. On top of that — on top of her, there’s Laura. Laura doesn’t pull stunts like this.

Carmilla pushes against Laura's shoulder. "Okay, I have to ask."

"What?"

"We got assigned this project three days ago and all you want to do is kiss me when we work." She almost can't believe that's an actual sentence that she just said. Maybe she needs shock therapy or something. "It's not like you."

"You're complaining that I want to kiss you?"

Carmilla rolls her eyes. "Maybe it's crazy, sure, but you're always a control freak about this stuff. I'm just checking that my girlfriend hasn't been pod-personed or something."

Laura gives up and slides off her lap. Carmilla lets her head fall back against the bookcase behind her. Idiot. She’s an idiot.

Laura laughs half-heartedly. "You lost me on the reference."

"Pod people? Body snatchers? It was some crappy book I read when I was ten. Aliens pretended to be people you know but they acted completely different. Like... this." She gestures to Laura and hates herself a little more as she does it.

"Sounds like a good book." Laura pulls her knees up to her chest and hugs them.

"Sounds like you're avoiding the subject."

She shrugs. "I don't want to think about the project. I want to kiss my girlfriend. Since when is that a
Carmilla shuts the textbook between them. "Is this about LaFontaine?"

"No," Laura whips her head up. "How do you know about LaF?"

"I listen, you know. The other one wouldn't stop complaining about being ignored the other day."

"Perry?"

Carmilla nods.

"So LaF is still ignoring her?"

She doesn't let herself roll her eyes. If Laura and her friends really think LaFontaine's biggest problem is social, they're fooling themselves.

"So, is it your friend?"

Laura shakes her head.

"Is it me?" Gross, that came out more pathetic than she wanted it to.

"No, of course it isn't." Laura laces their fingers together and squeezes her hand. "You're perfect. It's just... it's such a stupid thing that's just been bugging me."

"Tell me. Let it bug me too."

"It's not your stuff to worry about. It's my stuff."

She understands that feeling, but she can't help but be worried now. "Doesn't matter. Make it our stuff."

Laura shakes her head and smiles. "You're gonna laugh at me."

"Probably."

Her smile doesn't last long. "I was doing research the other night. When we got the project assigned."

Definitely not the direction she has expected this to go in, but Laura has her curious.

Laura pulls her hand away and starts to toy with the corner of their textbook. "Research about like, eating disorders and stuff."

"Sure."

Laura lets out a shaky breath and Carmilla sits up. "I think... I mean I probably don't but I just thought... what if I have one?"

"One what?"

"Like an eating issue... type... thing. I don't know." She shrugs and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear.

This is what she was worried about?
Carmilla smiles. "Laura, you worry about everything, you know that?"

"I know, it's probably dumb."

"Just because you have half a symptom in common doesn't mean you should start jumping to conclusions."

Laura looks away. "It's more than half a symptom," she says weakly.

"Do you make yourself throw up after eating?"

Laura shakes her head, but doesn’t say anything. She’s really taking this thing seriously.

“Well, then I think you’re gonna be okay.” She leans in and kisses her again, but the way Laura falls into it is off. She’s too eager, like she’s only kissing for the sake of not doing anything else.

She’s still thinking about it.

“Don’t you think if you had an eating disorder I would have noticed?”

“Nevermind. Like I said, it’s so stupid.” Laura kisses her again and then pulls back to smile. She’s trying to prove that she’s okay, and in Carmilla’s experience that’s the most common sign that she’s not okay.

“It’s cute.”

Laura’s smile falters.

“My little hypochondriac.”

That’s apparently the wrong thing to say, because Laura pushes herself away and picks up the textbook, flipping through the pages in her lap. “You’re right, we should just get to work.”

“Okay.” Carmilla bites the corner of lip and furrows her eyebrows. Something still feels wrong.

—

Kirsch (12:02am): [1 attachment]

Kirsch (12:02am): haha she’s dumb :)

D-Bear (12:03am): Is that one cat or two?

Kirsch (12:03am): u know I only have 1 cat

D-Bear (12:03am): How is her head even in that position? It can’t be comfortable.

Kirsch (12:04am): its a cat thing

D-Bear (12:04am): It’s weird.

D-Bear (12:10am): Have you changed my contact name back to Danny yet?

Kirsch (12:10am): maybe

D-Bear (12:11am): It’s still D-Bear isn’t it?
Danny sits up in bed when her phone rings. He’s calling at half past midnight. And on the one hand that could mean he’s dying but it could also just mean he’s being Kirsch. Or it could be a butt dial. She’s going to give him so much shit if it’s a butt dial.

She doesn’t bother to say hello. “Do you have any idea how late it is?”

“Yeah.” Kirsch says softly on the other end.

“Why did you call?”

It’s quiet on his end for a moment and then: “I’ve never told anybody about my name.”

“You mean about your Dad?”

“Yeah.”

Danny sinks back into the pillows on her bed. “Why’d you tell me?”

“I don’t know. You’ve told me personal stuff before.”

“Some.”

“I don’t know, I just felt like I could.”

It’s either her curiosity or her sympathy that wins out. “Is he not around anymore?”

“He left a long time ago.”

“I’m sorry.” It’s quiet for a moment, and she feels like she owes him something here. Something to let him know he can share things like this. Because it is okay. “I’m adopted.”

“I kind of figured.” He laughs and it even gets her smiling. “I’ve seen your parents at some of your meets. You’re like, nine feet taller than them.”

“Six and a half inches. How many of my meets do you go to?”

“Not a lot of them just like… the home ones.”
“Good to know I have a fan.”

“I don’t have a foam finger if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“You do in my mental image.”

“Well stop picturing me unless I’m naked.”

“Who says you aren’t?”

“Nevermind, keep picturing.” After half a second he adds, “Wait, where’s the foam finger?”

“Wouldn’t you love to know.”

She can hear him laughing and it’s a little infectious. By the time they stop laughing, she can hear the seriousness in Kirsch’s tone.

“Hey D-Bear?”

She sighs. The nickname is clearly a losing battle. “What?”

“There’s nothing wrong with being adopted.”

“There’s nothing wrong with a kid raised by a single parent.”

“I don’t really like talking about him.”

“You don’t have to.” She searches for something to change the subject to. “How about you explain why you sent me a picture of your cat at midnight.”

“She’s cute.”

“I hate cats. You know I hate cats.”

“Just ‘cause you hate something now doesn’t mean you’ll hate it forever.”

“Yeah. We’ll see.”

—

Kirsch falls asleep around 3 a.m. before either of them hang up.

—

Laura can feel her heart racing as the types a search into her browser. Sure, this is no explicit fanfic on her phone while she's inches from her Dad, but Carmilla is on the bed with her and she could sit up and see what she's searching any second now. Laura leans back against the headboard and weighs her options — sneak away to the bathroom to do a little more research or just risk Carmilla seeing it. She settles for the latter. Carmilla is reading a book on her stomach at the end of the bed anyway. And if she sees her laptop, Laura technically has a valid school-related excuse.

She hits the search button.

She has six tabs open when Carmilla turns on her side to look at Laura. "You know you're perfect, right?"

Way to make a girl blush.
Laura smiles. "You're perfect, too."

She doesn't stop there. "You're sweet. You're beautiful."

"What's with the sudden praise?" She asks around a smile.

"I'm just saying." Carmilla shrugs. "You don't need to change anything about yourself. You know that right?"

Should she be saying this back? Is Carmilla trying to tell her she loves her or something? That feels too soon. They haven't been dating that long.

"You don't need to look different or try to change yourself or lose weight."

Oh.

Now she gets it.

"You're pretty just the way you are. You're skinny — everyone likes the way you look." Carmilla offers her a sly smile. "I don't call you cutie for nothing, and at the risk of sounding like your golden retriever friend, I might even be willing to upgrade to hottie. As long as I have the liberty of saying it ironically."

Laura feels a lump forming in her throat. She closes the tabs on her laptop and pulls the screen almost shut. "Come here." Pushing the computer off her lap, she pulls Carmilla towards the head of the bed and weaves a hand through her hair. She kisses her hard and wills herself not to get upset. Mind over matter, she has to stop thinking about this. It's like a hysterical pregnancy but with her stupid eating habits. She's a teenager for crying out loud.

This is stupid.

She kisses her harder.

She's stupid for clinging to this. She's stupid for letting it get to her. She's stupid for looking to complete strangers on the internet for advice.

Her stomach growls and she slips her hand under Carmilla's shirt—

She feels a rough shove against her shoulder and then Carmilla distances herself from her, hesitating for a moment before she stands up from the bed.

"I have to go."

"What? Did I do something?"

"No," She shakes her head. "Will's gonna be home soon."

"Okay." She hasn't moved from the position she fell into when Carmilla shoved her back. When her own girlfriend shoved her away.

Carmilla nods and slips out the door in the blink of an eye, but her door opens half a minute later. Her face still gives away nothing.

"And Laura?"

"Yeah?" Her voice cracks when she says it and she braces herself for the tears that she knows she'll
have to cry sometime tonight. She's too much of an emotional piece of work to not cry over... just everything that's been happening.

"Your Dad's bringing dinner home soon." Laura's stomach sinks. "You should eat."

She slips out the door again and Laura sinks into the bed.

Of course. She heard her stomach growl. She heard her stomach growl and now she's freaked out.

Laura reaches for her computer and pushes the screen up. She hits ctrl+shift+T six times to bring her tabs back and starts to read.

*If you are restricting your intake (not eating much) you may have noticed the following behaviours. Do you?*

Her heart grows heavier as she reads through the list.

—

**Care Perr (4:12pm):** Have you started your essay?

**Care Perr (5:20pm):** Laura and carmilla seem to be doing well

**Care Perr (5:43pm):** I'm really not sure how we’re supposed to be doing this essay.

**Care Perr (6:02pm):** You’ve probably let your phone die

**Care Perr (6:08pm):** You’re always doing that.

—

**JP (6:10pm):** guess who’s parents just left him home alone with a huge box of pizza and a new video game to play?

**LaF (6:11pm):** be there in 10

**JP (6:14pm):** i’ve got a huge bag of doritos with your name on ‘em

—

**Care Perr (12:12am):** Please don’t ignore me.

—

**Group Chat: Bros (7 people)**

**Kirsch (4:00pm):** carnival 2nite @ the park. who’s in??

**Carmilla (4:02pm):** how did you get my number?

**Kirsch (4:02pm):** will gave it 2 me

**Kirsch (4:02pm):** u in or not?

**Laura (4:05pm):** she’s in
“Are you gonna win me a bear?” Laura clings to Carmilla’s arm as they walk. She grins up at her.

“Can’t I just buy you a bear any other time?”

Laura pouts. It’s not the same. She tries again. “Are you gonna win me a bear, though?”

“You have a bear.” Carmilla finally looks down at her. “You have multiple bears.”

“But... are you gonna win me a bear?”

Carmilla rolls her eyes. “Maybe.”

They’re walking in the middle of a crowded carnival, but Laura doesn’t hesitate when she stops her in her tracks and presses a kiss to her lips.

It’s enough for Carmilla to give in. “Fine,” She says against Laura’s lips. “I’ll win you a bear.”

Laura kisses her harder the second time. She pulls Carmilla closer by the sides of her shirt and deepens the kiss. By the way Carmilla fumbles with the placement of her hands, Laura can tell she wasn’t expecting it.

Laura grins and pulls back to place a peck against the corner of her mouth. “And how many bears do I get if I keep that up?”

“Pick a number.”

There’s kissing after that — a lot more kissing. To be honest, she loses track of time and... everything, in general. All she knows is the lights are bright and the music isn’t too loud and her favorite thing about this moment is the way Carmilla’s thumb strokes her cheek as softly as it does. It’s nice.

When Laura hears a harsh cough come from her left, she pulls back, much to Carmilla’s disappointment. LaFontaine stands in front of them, looking a little horrified and clinging to their bag of chips.

“LaF! Hey...” She hears a groan from Carmilla and with nothing else to say, all she can come up with is, “We were just talking about you.” She doesn’t know why she says it. It’s something to say,
at least. Carmilla looks confused and LaFontaine looks a little uncomfortable.

“Don’t tell me,” they insist. “I don’t want to know.” LaFontaine shakes their head. “Listen, you gotta try the pizza in that stand by the ferris wheel. It is the bomb. For real. It has a wicked pepperoni crust, it’s so good, plus I’m pretty sure there’s this double layer of cheese...” Their voice trails off and their eyes focus on something over Laura’s head.

She turns around to see what they’re looking at — Perry, standing by a ring toss booth.

“Um. I should go.”

Laura nods. “Yeah, you probably should.” She wonders if asking how many days they’ve spent avoiding Perry would be like rubbing salt in a wound. Probably.

“How screwed am I?”

It’s Carmilla that pipes in this time. “Pretty screwed.”

“I probably deserve that. Alright, yeah. I’m gonna go. See ya.”

“See ya.” Laura waves them a goodbye and then turns back to Carmilla. “So... what do you want to do now?”

“Why don’t we try out that pizza?”

Laura feels her stomach turn. “I’m really not all that hungry right now.”

Carmilla furrows her eyebrows and frowns. “When was the last time you ate.”

“Lunch?”

“That was six hours ago.”

She knows. She’s been counting... sort of. She’s more aware of these things now. She wonders if that’s good or bad.

“Come on, just one slice.”

She wants to. Or she wants to want to. Or maybe she doesn’t. Laura doesn’t know for sure what she wants. Except she wants Carmilla to stop pushing her right now. “I’m not hungry, just drop it.”

Carmilla locks her jaw. “I don’t believe you. C’mon, we’ll share a slice. You don’t have to act like it’s the end of the world.” Laura feels her face grow hotter. She’s getting worked up over this and her entire body can feel it. Does it show? “We can fix this, Laura. You just have to eat, it’s not that hard.”

Laura blinks up at her in shock as she steps away. She doesn’t even know what to say or how to react. How is something like that supposed to make her feel? What’s the right way to feel about this?

She wants to run.

“Laura, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean—”

“Don’t.”

She shakes her head and walks in the opposite direction.
By the time they work up the courage to approach Perry, she’s moved to one of the game booths and she’s aiming a slingshot at a stack of soda cans.

It’s been a few days. With the exception of that one fight in freshman year, it’s probably one of the longest periods of time they’ve gone without speaking. LaFontaine takes a deep breath and steps into Perry’s line of vision. She can see them out of the corner of her eye now and her body tenses.

“Bad time?”

Perry doesn’t take her eyes off of the soda cans. “You tell me. You avoid me for days and then you want to talk when I’m holding a weapon?”

LaFontaine places a tentative hand on Perry’s shoulder and turns her to look at them. “Perr, I’m so sorry.”

Perry softens and drops the slingshot on the counter. “I’m sorry too.”

“Do you want to go for a walk?”

“Are you going to tell me what’s wrong?”

LaFontaine nods. In a split second, Perry has her arms around them. “Thank you. I hate fighting, thank you.” They smile and hug her tight, taking in her smell and smiling into the faceful of curls they’re met with. “I never want to fight again,” Perry says.

LaFontaine laughs softly. “Don’t get ahead of yourself.” They pull back and take a deep breath.

“Why? What is it, what’s so bad that you can’t tell me.”

They scratch at the back of their head and make a very bad decision in that moment. “There’s this guy I know. His name is JP and... I think it’s about time I told you about him.”

Laura glares at the worker manning the ferris wheel when it comes to a stop for a seventh time. She paid for the first six rides, but she thinks there’s gotta be a certain level of respect she’s owed. She’s been riding it for a while now — sometimes crying, sometimes pouting, but always upset. Maybe if she cries he won’t charge her.

It turns out she doesn’t have to. The ride stalls for a moment and the worker decides to turn a blind eye to Laura’s new residency on his ride. He steps back to turn the ride on again and then all she sees is a blur of black hair and black clothes jumping into the seat next to her.

“Hey!” The worker barks as the ferris wheel begins to move.

Carmilla tosses down a few dollars and that seems to be enough for the worker to leave her alone. Laura kind of wishes he’d stopped the ride and forced her off.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m riding the ferris wheel, cupcake.”

Laura crosses her arms across her chest and looks away.
“You’re brooding.”

“So?”

“So, brooding is my thing. It’s not fair to brood without me.”

Laura doesn’t say anything to that. She’s still not sure what to say or how to feel.

“I’m doing this all wrong aren’t I?”

Until then. Now she knows how to feel. Now she feels it all at once. “Yep.”

Carmilla’s eyebrows raise on their own and she can tell it shocks her. Laura’s using the tone her Dad hates. And maybe that’s a bit much. Carmilla looks like it guts her. That’s not what she wants.

“Do you think you really—”

“Yes.”

“Have you done any research—”

“Yes.”

“Laura...” Carmilla moves a strand of hair out of Laura’s eyes and tucks it behind her ear. “I’m sorry about all the stupid shit I said.”

Laura slides her hand over Carmilla’s leg and squeezes her knee. “I’m not mad. Really. It’s just complicated.” Laura fights through the feeling that tells her she’s close to crying. “I just don’t know what’s happening.”

“Tell me what to do. Let me fix it.”

Laura lets out a frustrated sigh. “You can’t fix me, Carmilla.”

“No,” She shakes her head and pulls Laura against her. “No, I mean us. Let me fix us.” She looks down and Laura can feel the insecurity radiating off of her. She knows Carmilla and she knows how she can get — insecure, hurt, powerless, every other feeling she pretends that she’s never experienced. “Don’t tell me I’ve already fucked us up, it hasn’t even been a month.”

“Hey.” Laura tilts Carmilla’s chin up with a finger. “One fight isn’t a break up.” She decides to fall back on one of Carmilla’s preferred defense mechanisms. “Besides, you’re too good a kisser to break up with.”

Carmilla leans forward and kisses Laura’s cheek. “Good to know.” She breaths in deep and then laces their fingers together, squeezing tight. “So this is real?”

She nods.

“I’m sorry I didn’t notice.”

“You couldn’t have.”

“I know. But I’m sorry I didn’t notice. And if it’s any consolation...” Carmilla reaches between her legs for the mostly empty backpack she always carries around. She unzips it and tugs something purple and furry out of it.
“You won me the bear.” Laura strokes the stuffed animal’s head and grins.

“I might have stolen it.”

She gasps. “Carm. That’s not the same.”

Carmilla shrugs defensively. “Those games are rigged, you know that.”

“Way to stick it to the man, babe.”

---

It’s a cop out. It’s absolutely a cop out and they feel like garbage when Perry forgives them immediately. Of course she’s forgiving them. She thinks JP is the entire story.

It’s a cop out.

“Honey, you should have just told me.”

“I know, but,” LaFontaine kicks at the grass as they walk. “I thought it would have killed you.” No, they know what would have really killed her. And it’s not JP.

“Why would I be upset? You have a new friend and your parents are treating you so much better.” LaFontaine frowns when they recognize the rationalizing tone of her voice. “I won’t say that I’m happy about it.” Perry shrugs. “I wish that it was me, but this sort of situation, it was... an eventuality.” Her shoulders slump. “I just wish you’d told me.”

“An eventuality? What happened to better closeted together than out and alone?”

Perry waves her hand as if to shrug off the implication. “That was about legitimate relationships.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I guess.”

“You don’t have feelings for JP, do you?”

“What?” LaFontaine chuckles. “No, no, of course not. Honestly? I think he gets tired of the way I can’t shut up about you around him. Couldn’t be farther from the truth.”

Perry smiles. “You’re sweet.”

“You’re too good for me.”

Perry looks around — it’s a crowded carnival and they already know the conclusion she’ll reach. It’s not a good place for this. Perry hooks her pinky finger around LaFontaine’s index finger. “Thank you for telling me.”

God, they’re the worst person on earth, and that’s including the woman who runs that food blog and spreads lies about the effects of vaccinations. They’re even worse than her. This is what it feels like to be a human disaster.

“—"

“You’re kidding me.”

“What?”
“You’re kidding me.” Danny shakes her head because this has to be a joke. This is literally a joke, there isn’t a single person in America who hasn’t seen at least one tragically low budget horror movie that starts exactly like this.

“What’s wrong?”

Danny gestures to the empty house. It’s broken down and unkempt and definitely nowhere near sturdy. There are literal cobwebs on the front porch. The rickety front porch, probably. She doubts it’s seen a paint job since Kennedy was in office.

“You got me to come to this stupid carnival for this?” Danny turns to look somewhat longingly at the carnival from where they stand, across the street from all the lights. “You want to be the white couple who gets trapped by demons in some freaky haunted house in the dead of night?”

“Hey.” Kirsch hops up the porch steps and leans against the railing. Good. At least he’s not falling through it. That means the wood hasn’t been taken over by termites. “Ex-haunted house. They use it once a year around halloween, it’s totally safe. And since when are we a couple?”

This place makes her skin crawl, but not quite like that implication does.

“Couple means two people, moron. And all I’m saying is if you’re gonna try to drag me into a deserted house to try to have sex on a dead woman’s couch before some supernatural shit pops up to carve vague threats in dead languages into our skin, then I want a stake in my hand before I walk through that front door.”

“What are you gonna do with a stake, fight off a vampire?”

“I could take on a vampire.”

“You sound crazy.”

She probably does.

“You need to just chill, dude. I just want to check it out. And if you think I’m gonna try anything, relax. I don’t even have a condom.”

She rolls her eyes. “Because if you did, sex would be inevitable, right? Dumbass.”

“If you want to complain all night, be my guest. I’m going inside. You can stay, you know...” He offers her a cocky smile. “If you’re too scared.”

Danny narrows her eyes at him. “Move it, pretty boy.”

Kirsch shoves his hands in his pockets and leans back on his heels. “Ooh, I’m pretty now.”

The inside is dark — of course — only illuminated by the light of the carnival coming through the front windows. It’s scary in its own way, but it also feels... plastic. She can tell it was made to look scary for Halloween. The store bought cobwebs sort of ruin the effect, not that she was scared.

She doesn’t hear him move but suddenly Kirsch is behind her.

“Freaky,” he notes, “Kinda cool, though.”

“Maybe if you think a bunch of used furniture with unrealistic holes in them are cool.”

Kirsch shrugs and she hears him walk away. His footsteps leave the sound of creaking floorboards in
his wake, and they echo the farther he gets from where she stands, somewhere in the dining room. He walks through the kitchen and comes through the other exit, pushing cobwebs out of his path and being spectacularly dramatic about it. She’s pretty certain they’re fake anyway.

“So, uh. Since you brought it up,” he starts nonchalantly, “Are we ever gonna have sex?” He doesn’t pay attention to where he’s walking while he talks and he trips into a rocking chair that falls apart with a dull crash of wood furniture on wood floors.

“That was impressive.”

Kirsch brushes it off and starts to close the distance between them. “That didn’t sound like a no.”

She purses her lips and decides maybe the truth would work in her favor in this case. “That’s because it wasn’t one.”

He walks closer until they’re both almost touching. The chandelier above them nearly grazes both their heads. They’re too tall for this.

“Was it a yes?”

She smiles and hooks her pinky around Kirsch’s index finger. She doesn’t know why — she just does it. Maybe she likes toying with him a little. Maybe she likes it for other reasons.

“It was a... it's on the table.”

Kirsch grins and lands a peck against her lips. “Cool. It’s uh, on the table for me too, if you were wondering.”

She doesn’t roll her eyes, but she’s pretty sure it’s been on the table for him since he hit puberty.

“So this is us, uh, officially,” He makes a pushing gesture off to the side. “Putting it on the table.”

“Kirsch?”

He hums a response and watches her with wide eyes.

“It’s been on the table for a while now.” Danny uses her free hand to tug on one of his belt loops and pull him closer. “It’s probably gathering dust.”

If it’s possible, his eyes get even wider. “For real?”

She kisses him to make sure he doesn’t say anything even more moronic to remind her why she should probably have higher standards. His hands move to her hips and hold her there. It’s oddly nice, not like any of the other guys she’s been with. They’re usually handsier than this. He has an impressive amount of self-control for a teenage boy that was just promised sex.

Kirsch pulls back. “Wait, how long has it been on the table?”

“I didn’t mark the date on my calendar.” She tries to kiss him again but it doesn’t last more than ten seconds.

“Ballpark?”

“I’m not giving you a ballpark.”

“C’mon, please.”
She gives in to the urge to roll her eyes and she steps back, starting to walk towards the front door of the house. She knows he’ll follow. He’d be stupid not to. “It’s late, we should go home.”

“Aw, c’mon, D-Bear.” Oh, she’s definitely not telling him now. “Don’t be like that, how long? I know you know how long, just tell me.”

—

The walk back to her house is quiet. Carmilla holds her hand the whole way home, but Laura can’t help but think it feels more like an apology than a gesture of affection. She doesn't call her out on that. It's already been a long night.

They climb the porch steps and Laura reaches for her key before Carmilla body blocks her from the door. "I really shouldn't stay over tonight."

"Why not? It's a friday."

"It really isn't about you - I swear, okay?" She pushes Laura's hair back and cups her cheek. "My Mom's been... more attentive lately. She's getting stricter."

Laura pulls away. "Do you think she knows about us?"

She shakes her head. "No. I think she just knows I'll be eighteen in a month."

Laura blinks and does the math in her head. "Oh my God you will be, won't you?"

"Yep."

"I always forget you repeated a year." She shakes her head in disbelief. "You're just so smart."

"Smart doesn't always mean motivated."

Laura steps closer and toys with a lock of Carmilla's hair. "I'll be dating an adult in a month."

"You will."

Laura leans forward to kiss her and she thinks maybe this moment belongs in a movie or something — the girl coming home from a date with her first girlfriend, kissing her goodbye on the porch.

Carmilla holds her hips in place and deepens the kiss until—

The porch light starts to flicker. She thinks it's about to go out until she realizes the on/off rhythm is too steady to be natural.

"That's my Dad."

Carmilla laughs softly. "I thought people only did that in movies."

She nods. "We watch a lot of movies." Laura kisses her again, softer this time. "You're sure you have to go? We could play video games and listen to the album leak one more time?"

Carmilla nods and lets her forehead rest against Laura's. "Now I'm definitely sure."

Right. Probably not the most convincing argument. That's okay. That's good, actually. She needs to talk to her Dad. Alone. That's what pretty much everything online says she needs to do — talk to a trusted adult. There's only one man for that job.
"Okay. Bye." Laura kisses her one more time — is that too much? She feels a little clingy, but Carmilla doesn't seem to mind.

Once she's off the porch, Laura waits for her to be out of sight before she takes a deep breath and reaches for the doorknob.

He plays innocent when he sees her, as if he hadn't been signaling for them to wrap things up. There's even a trace of guilt in his expression.

"Hey, kid. How was your night?" He folds up the newspaper he was pretending to read and takes off his glasses.

"It was good." Laura sets her bag down on the coffee table and takes a deep breath.

"Good. We should get to bed, then."

"Um." Great start, Hollis. "Dad?"

"What is it?"

"I need to tell you something."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was written by Bianca. Track the tumblr tags #hsau updates for chapter updates and #carmilla hsau for general updates on the AU.

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